"MY OWN CHILD."

"MY OWN CHILD."

A Novel.

BY

FLORENCE MARRYAT,

AUTHOR OF

"LOVE'S CONFLICT," "FIGHTING THE AIR, "VÉRONIQUE,"
ETC. ETC. ETC.

"There is, in all this cold and hollow world, no fount
Of deep, strong, deathless Love, save that within
A Mother's heart."

Hemans.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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TO

MY OWN CHILD,

ETHEL MAUDE ALPE,

AND TO HER HUSBAND,

EDMUND NICHOLAS ALPE,

I OFFER THIS FAINT REFLECTION

OF A

FEELING IMPRESSED ON MY HEART IN COLOURS

WHICH NEITHER

TIME NOR CIRCUMSTANCE WILL HAVE

THE POWER TO FADE.

"What is it? Ask the King of Kings,
WHO hath decreed above,
That Change shall mark all earthly things
Except—a Mother's Love."

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MY OWN CHILD.

CHAPTER XXVI.

FIVE THOUSAND A YEAR!

THE next morning I renewed the subject of the ball of my own accord. I was so afraid my darling might be fretting in secret over her disappointment.

"May dear! I am writing to Lady Power, and I shall ask her opinion as to whether you may go to this dance or not. I dare say she will see no objection, and then we shall feel quite safe.

"No, don't ask her, mothie!"

"Why not, my dear?"

"Because I don't care about it—indeed, I would rather not go."

"You have changed your mind rather suddenly, May," I said in surprise.

"I don't think I've changed my mind, mother; that is to say, of course I should like the dancing, and the fun, and all that; but I didn't know, you see—you never told me before of the reason there was for my not coming out in a place like Brussels; and I understand plainly, dear, that my *début* should be different from that of other girls—that I ought, in fact, to make my first appearance with a splash and a dash."

She laughed lightly as she finished her sentence, but I saw that she meant it.

"*Five thousand a year!*" she went on; "I could hardly sleep last night for thinking of it. How much does that make a day, mother?"

"Oh! May, try not to look upon it in that light. I should break my heart if you were to become fond of money. You are not to have it, remember, till you come of

age, and then I suppose there will be proper people selected to look after the major part of it for you; and the allowance which will be reserved for your own private use you must try to lay out in the manner which will bring you most credit with God, and not with man."

"You mean by helping the poor. Why, of course I shall, mothie! But why are you so serious about it? Money is a very good thing to have!"

"Sometimes, darling."

"Always! when we know how to spend it. And we have never had more than *just enough*. There are dozens of things I know you want, and would like to have, that you can't afford yourself. But you shall have them all when I get my money, dear, see if you don't!"

She came dancing up to me as she spoke, and looked with her bright, sweet Irish face into mine.

"So I am not to mention the bachelors' ball," I said, with a view to changing the subject, which annoyed me, I hardly knew why. The fact is, I instinctively felt that the peaceful years I had spent in the rearing of my own child were rapidly drawing to a close; and in prospect of our return to Gentian's Cross and the hospitality of Lady Power, I experienced much the same sensations as I had done on the occasion of my first visit there.

"No! but I wish you'd ask grandmamma what she thinks about our going to Italy before we return home."

"To Italy, May! That's a new idea."

"I've often wished to go there, and so have you, and we may never have another opportunity. And I'm getting just a little bit sick of dear old Brussels; mother, arn't you?"

"I'm *very* sick of it," I responded with energy.

"And it would be so charming to see Rome together! When are we supposed to return to Ireland, mother?"

"Next May," I said with a sigh.

"And this is October. We shouldn't have more than a few months there altogether. And I want some good singing and Italian lessons terribly. Can't we manage it, darling?"

"I have no doubt we can, May. The idea strikes me as pleasantly as it does you. I have wanted a change for some time, and there is no occasion to ask Lady Power's leave. But I will tell her of our intentions by to-day's post.

The prospect charmed me, as much as any prospect could charm me just then. I considered the proposal as a happy inspiration on my child's part, and wondered I had not thought of it myself. To quit Brussels at that period was the very best thing that I could do. True, that Lord

Eustace Annerley had kept his word and left the town; but I never felt quite sure whether he might not return; and without that fear there were too many sad recollections associated with the various places we had frequented together, to render it possible that I should ever take the same pleasure in visiting them again.

May and I experienced little difficulty in carrying out our project. We had no personal property but such as we could easily take with us, and only one maid who was permanently attached to our service, and accompanied us everywhere. So that at the end of a month we found ourselves comfortably settled in Genoa, which we had decided to make our first resting-place.

During the next six months we moved quietly about from city to city, just suiting our own inclinations as to how long we should remain in each; and if I was not happy or entirely at ease, I was, at least, content.

It contented me to watch my darling girl enjoying herself—to hear the expressions of admiration which followed her blonde beauty wherever it was seen—to take interest in her various studies; and, above all, to mark how completely ignorant she appeared to be that anything had ever happened to disturb the inner peace of my life. We stayed at Florence, Rome, Genoa, Naples, and Leghorn; and I had learned, by reason of the blessed vision vouchsafed to me at Paris, to bear my little burden so manfully that, had it not been for an occasional heart-stab as old remembrances came over me, I should have almost believed that I was cured. But, as far as my physical health was concerned, I was certainly not strong. Up to that period of my life, I had been a remarkably healthy woman, never very robust in appearance or reality, but with a good appetite, an unimpaired digestion, and great capability for bearing fatigue. Now, little

by little my appetite failed me, my sleep became restless and interrupted, and a very slight exertion would be followed by unusual languor. For some time I attributed the change to the climate of Genoa, but I did not find that the temperature of other places agreed with me better. I laid all the blame then upon Italy, and decided that I should not recover my usual strength until I had quitted it again.

But I was very anxious that my dear child should not have the least suspicion that I was ailing, and seriously cautioned my maid not to breathe a hint that might alarm her. I knew how affectionate and sensitive a disposition she possessed—how easily she would become frightened over a mere trifle, if it concerned me—and I would not run the chance of making her think it necessary to leave Italy one moment earlier than she need, for my sake. So I locked this little secret in my own breast (as I had locked

the other), and fully believed that it needed but my native air to set me up again.

We returned to England in April, when my daughter had just completed her sixteenth year—I, my thirty-second! Lady Power had made a great point of our being at Gentian's Cross by the beginning of May, as the Vice-regal drawing-room and ball, at which my child was to be presented and make her *début*, were to be held during the course of the month. How heavy was my heart on the day we turned our feet homewards! A presentiment of evil hung over me for which I could not account. May was blooming and happy; full of love and duty to myself; a daughter any mother might be proud to own; and she was about to be launched on the world under the most favourable auspices. Surrounded by affection and luxury—with Lady Power and myself as her chaperones—with a bright present, and still brighter future, what could

I, under the most extravagant circumstances, have wished more for my child than she was about to receive? It would seem as though the wildest hopes of any parent were about, in her case, to be amply realised. Yet I was unhappy—morbidly, wickedly unhappy, as I told myself. The old feeling of fear with which I had formerly approached the Power family had died out. I was now a woman of mature age, and independent of everybody. I knew that if I disapproved of anything that was said or done with respect to my daughter, I had the right to take her away then and there, and keep her, until she became of age, under my own control. And I had determination enough to carry such a resolution into effect, should it at any time become necessary to do so. But I was not in the least afraid of any such necessity arising. I knew that Lady Power was propriety itself—and generosity itself where May was concerned—and my child

would be at all times as safe under her wing as mine. It was not unkindness or inattention I feared for her; it was too much love, too much indulgence.

The old curse of jealousy and desire of complete appropriation was stirring in my breast again, and I felt, in taking May back to Ireland, as though I were once more relinquishing half my claim on her affection, and offering it up as a victim on the altar of the Powers' pride in the possession of their heiress.

This was very weak of me—very foolish. I hope it may have been partly attributable to the fact of my ill-health, that I did not show much more strength of mind at thirty-two than I had done at sixteen. But during the last six months I had clung to my child perhaps more than ever as the sole good thing I had left; and to part with even a thousandth part of her, at the demand of the world, was a sacrifice to me.

May did not share my gloomy prognostications in any way. On the contrary, she was full of life and spirits—sometimes, perhaps, almost too much so. For since the day on which I had thought fit to intrust her with the knowledge of her prospective fortune, I had observed a difference in my child. Not towards me—never towards me, thank God!—but with regard to the rest of the world.

Her character appeared to change, or rather I should say, perhaps, that it suddenly developed. It has been mentioned before that Hugh, young as he was at the time of his death, had evinced a very impulsive yet determined disposition, and his child inherited these traits from him. And, furthermore, she had taken from me a sharper, quicker temper than her father ever had. She conceived strong likes and dislikes, and took no pains to conceal them—as in the case of Lord Eustace Annerley. I do

not believe that, by nature, she was avaricious, but she was fond of power; and the prospect of a large fortune represented power to her.

With the knowledge of what was coming, she betrayed a disposition to haughtiness which pained me. She became dominant and overbearing to her fellows in a manner I could not bear to see. Yet I consoled myself with the idea of how much better, in reality, she was than the majority of her companions.

"She is very clever," I thought, "and she is very young. When she grows older, and sees of how very little value talent is compared with goodness and virtue, she will learn to think more humbly of herself. Life is just opening before her; new ideas, fresh theories, crop up in her mind each day; and in the ignorance of youth she fancies, because they are new to her, they must be so to all the world; and because

she has not the experience wherewith to combat them, they who do so wish to quarrel with her. She is too positive at present—too sure of herself in everything—but she has a large heart and a large mind, and they are the safest ballast to take us steadily through life."

So I battled with my own conviction, unwilling to think my darling could be anything short of perfect; doubly so to harbour the idea that the prospect of so paltry an acquisition as wealth could have the power to make her think herself better than her companions.

It was evening when we arrived at Gentian's Cross. We had had a rough and fatiguing passage from Holyhead, and I was fairly worn out. But the family carriage was in waiting for us at the Dublin station, and I had no need to do more than to rest till it landed us at the house itself. Lady Power, her daughters

Margaret and Blanche (Norah had married an officer in the army, and gone out to India with him about a year before), and Mrs. Delancey were assembled in the library to welcome us.

"Good gracious, Katie, how ill you look!" was the greeting with which Juliet received me.

May, who was in her grandmother's arms, turned sharply at the words.

"Ill, Aunt Juliet!" she exclaimed. "Mother's not ill. She's only tired."

"That's all; only tired," I echoed, with an attempt at a smile. I felt as if I were sinking into the ground.

"Juliet is always a bit of a croaker, especially in regard to you, Katharine," said Lady Power, as she condescended to imprint a kiss upon my forehead. "A good night's rest is all you need to set you up again."

"Well, if the difference in your appear-

ance is entirely due to fatigue," said Juliet bluntly, "all I can say is fatigue has an extraordinary effect on you. Why, you are mere skin and bone compared to what you were last year!"

"We felt the heat in Florence very much," I responded quickly. "I think May has lost flesh also."

"Not a bit of it. She is looking perfectly well."

"Frances is looking charming," added her old grandmother, who did not seem as if she could take her eyes off my child. She had not dropped, and never did, the habit of opposing me on the subject of my daughter's name. "And she is the very image of what I was at her age. She will make quite a sensation at the drawing-room on the 24th."

"Or her dress will," remarked Margaret Power, who was the most unpleasant of them all.

"Such a dress!" said Juliet. "It is worth looking at, Frances. Grandmamma sent all the way to Paris for it."

"To Worth's?" exclaimed May.

"Yes, to Worth's."

"Mother, isn't that jolly?" she said, turning to me, with sparkling eyes. The remarks on my appearance did not seem to have had any effect on her. I was so thankful.

"I think your mother will be glad to get to her own room, Frances," said Juliet. "Suppose you go and make yourselves comfortable before dinner, and we will have a formal inspection of your wonderful dress afterwards."

I managed to drag through the dinner-hour somehow, and as soon as it was concluded, in pity to my dear May's evident anxiety, we were all ushered with much pomp into a spare room, where, laid out upon the bed, was Worth's last effort on behalf of the Power family.

It looked very simple, but, like all costumes by the same milliner, it was a triumph of good taste and extravagance.

The petticoat and bodice were almost entirely covered with point lace. The train, of soft creamy white satin, was trimmed with the same costly material, relieved at intervals by bunches of snowy white feathers. There was not a thread of colour anywhere. All was pure, spotless, and bridal-like.

I pictured my child's golden hair contrasting with the shining white drapery, and could not refrain from an expression of admiration. As for May, she was speechless with delight.

"She will wear the family diamonds with it," remarked Lady Power, in a tone of gratified ambition. "Margaret thinks it is not orthodox she should do so until they become hers by law; but it is my wish, and no one has the right to gainsay me."

"Dear grandmamma!" said May kissing her.

"You are the only hope left to me, my dear Frances, remember," responded the old lady; "and whilst you are a good and affectionate girl, I shall consider nothing that I can do too much for you."

"May is the best daughter that ever lived," I interposed fondly. "She is not likely to behave less well in any other relation of life."

"Ah! my dear, so we thought of her poor father," replied Lady Power, with a significant intonation that told me I was not quite forgiven, even after sixteen years of penance, for the part I had taken in that transaction.

"Have you thought of what dress you are going to wear at the Drawing-room yourself, Katie?" said Juliet, with an evident view to changing the conversation.

"No! *I* am not to be presented, I

hope!" I replied, with a comical look of dismay.

"Nonsense! you must go with your daughter. I think your absence would be very conspicuous."

"I never dreamt of it. I never imagined it would be necessary. I thought Lady Power was going to present May to Lady——"

"And no more it is necessary, my dear," said my mother-in-law sharply. "Not in the slightest degree. *I* shall, of course, present my granddaughter to Lady—— under any circumstances, and there is no occasion at all for your troubling yourself in the matter."

"But you would like to see Frances at her first ball," persisted Juliet.

"Can't I go to the ball unless I attend the Drawing-room?"

"No; the invitations are only issued for those who have done so. And I think it

will be a marked omission if you are not present at your daughter's *début*."

"Oh, yes, dear mothie, you *must* go to the ball," pleaded May. "I couldn't enjoy it without you. I shouldn't dance a bit, thinking of you at home. And do have a mauve dress, darling; mauve becomes you so beautifully; and send to old Worth for it. There's plenty of time. And you will look so pretty, and so young, and so nice—I know you will."

"She'll be taking off all your partners if you don't take care, May," said Juliet, laughing.

"Mothie, darling, you *will* go—won't you?"

"Why, May, what should I do with a dress from Worth when I had got it? And mauve, too, you silly child! I wonder you don't suggest pink at once. No; if I *do* go, it will be in half-mourning, and the Court milliner in Dublin will make me a

dress quite good enough for all the use I shall put it to."

"I should go entirely in white, if I were you," said Juliet.

"Perhaps I may, dear. I couldn't wear colours."

"Never mind, so you *do* go," interposed my child.

The conversation did not seem to please Lady Power. She had been fidgeting about from the commencement of it, and now she struck in tartly:

"It would be quite absurd of Katharine to go in white when her daughter is in white also. People would laugh at her."

"I don't see that at all, mamma," said Juliet decidedly. "Katie's dress need not be made in the same style as Frances', nor of the same material; but much older women than herself wear white when it suits them. And it especially suits Katie's chestnut hair."

"There is no need of her appearing at the Drawing-room at all," repeated Lady Power, preparing to quit the room; "but, if she *does* go, I hope Katharine's own sense will show her it would be ridiculous to go tricked out like a young girl of sixteen."

I felt too ill to dispute the subject with her, and, whispering to Juliet that I was tired and wished to go to bed, I sought my own room instead of accompanying the party downstairs. May—dear, darling child—wanted to accompany me as usual, but I persuaded her to remain with her grandmother, and resigned myself to the services of my maid.

I had lain in bed, utterly weary, but very wide awake, for perhaps two hours, before my child came up to bid me good-night. We were not to sleep in the same room, which was a trouble to me, and in the hurry of arrival May had not had time to enter

my apartment before. When she did, she looked round it with dissatisfaction.

"What a nasty little room they've given you!" she said.

"Little, darling! Why, it's larger than our old room at Brussels."

"But it's half the size of mine, mothie. I think the housemaid must have made a mistake, and shown us to the wrong ones."

"Oh! no, I dare say it's all right," I answered quietly; "and I like a small room, May."

I had no doubt whatever myself upon the subject. As it had been in days gone by, so it was now. The heiress of Gentian's Cross must have a good room, but it little signified how the heiress's mother was served.

"Grandmamma has been showing me the family jewels," said May, as she seated herself on my bed. "How beautiful they are! Have you ever seen them, mothie?"

"Never, darling."

"There are two sets of diamonds; and one has been just reset by Hunt and Roskell for my presentation. They do glitter so! And then there are two sets of pearls, and one of emeralds, and one of rubies and opals—and the rings, mothie, I should think there must be fifty rings if there is one, and they all fit into a large case made expressly for them. And grandmamma has shown me Hugh's portraits. She has three miniatures; one taken when he was a baby, and one when he was three years old, and one when he was twelve. And she has given me the baby one. What a dear little baby he must have been! But of course you've seen them, mothie, often and often?"

"I've never seen them," I cried, in a voice of pain. "She might have shown them to me. They would have been such a comfort years ago, when I was griev-

ing so bitterly for his sake. Where is your miniature, darling? Let me see it—do!"

"I'll run and fetch it, mother. I left it on my toilet-table."

Whilst she was absent my thoughts were very hard. Lady Power was not one whit altered. I should have the same battle to fight over again, and I determined that, cost what it might, I would attend the Drawing-room and the Ball. She should not wrest my daughter from my arms now, any more than she had been able to do then. But when May returned with the miniature of her dead father, taken at a twelvemonth, the sight of the innocent baby face looking out from its little old-fashioned cap—a face so like her own at the same age—softened my rebellious spirit, and I could only remember with gratitude what a blessing she had been to me, and how mercifully she had been preserved.

"It is just what you were at the same age, May," I said, as I examined the miniature. "I wonder Lady Power never showed it to me. She might have known how it would interest me, if only on that account."

"Keep it, dear mothie. I don't care about it," said May carelessly. "I would much rather you had it."

"Oh! no, May. Thank you for the kind thought, but you must not give away your grandmother's presents. Besides, this is an heirloom. But I should like to keep it just for to-night, darling. It looks so familiar to me. So like you both"—and I kissed the picture as I spoke.

"I say, mother," said May, in a mysterious voice, "do you know if all the furniture and ornaments come to me with Gentian's Cross?"

"I don't know, dear. I never asked. Why?"

"Because there are several things here I should like to have—indeed, that I think I ought to have. Hugh's portraits, for instance, and the family pictures, and that bust of my grandfather, and the books. I shouldn't care a pin about the furniture—it's so old-fashioned; I expect I shall very soon turn it out of doors, if I do get it; but the other things should go with the house by rights."

"I don't know about the 'right' of it, May. Of course everything is properly and legally settled, and in due course you will have your own. But try and not think so much about it, darling. I can't bear that you should be always thinking of it, for fear it should never come to pass."

"It *must* come to pass if I live," said May, as she jumped lightly off the bed. "Good-night, my own sweet mother. Sleep well, and get up quite jolly in the morning."

"I will if I can, my darling," I answered lightly. She had nearly crossed the threshold of my room when she turned back again.

"You're not really ill—are you, mother?"

"Certainly not, dear."

"Because Aunt Juliet has been making an awful fuss about you downstairs. She says you are looking wretched, and that you must have been overdoing it, and all sorts of things."

"Aunt Juliet is always too kind. You know best how I have been."

"But you *do* look rather peakey."

"Well, the best remedy for that disease is rest; so be off to bed, you chatterbox, and leave me to go to sleep."

She ran away with a laugh as I spoke. Sweet, light-hearted laughter! How seldom was I to hear it after that night!

CHAPTER XXVII.

I FALL ILL.

But though May had left me, and everything around me was conducive to repose, I could not sleep. At first it was only a severe pain in my head, and a wearied, *beaten* feeling in my limbs, that prevented my going off; but then succeeded a period of intense wakefulness, during which I tried hard *not* to think, but found it impossible. Visions of the long ago blended themselves with prospects of the future—the faces of Hugh and May, and Lord Eustace, became mingled together. I was now a maid, now a wife, now a widow, now a mother, now nothing at all, but only

Katharine Power trying with all her might to banish thought and court forgetfulness instead. I heard the clocks strike one hour after another, and each hour seemed more interminably long than the last, and yet I appeared to be neither asleep nor awake, but lying in a state of drowsy consciousness. Once I found myself standing by the chest of drawers, having apparently left my bed in an aimless manner, and without being aware of the fact.

"Oh! this will never do," I said to myself. "Coming back to the old place has set me rambling. I *will* go to sleep! It only requires a strong effort of will to enable us to do what we choose."

So, having drunk a large draught of water, I found my way back to bed again, remarking, as I went, how very dry and hot my hands were, and how empty and light my head appeared to be. However, I did go to sleep that time, though very unsatis-

factorily, and when my maid appeared to call me in the morning, I was too ill to rise.

"Don't tell Miss May," I urged, "but I have such a very bad pain in my head, Parker, that I think it would be wiser if I were to lie in bed."

Parker did not tell May, but she went and fetched Mrs. Delancey, who sent immediately to Dublin for the family doctor. And his fiat was that I was going to be ill.

They did not tell me so at first, but the trouble broke gradually upon me, and indeed I had suspected it for some time past. May's alarm, when the news was communicated to her, was sufficient to make any mother conceal her symptoms as much as possible.

"Oh, you are going to die! I am sure my mother is going to die," she whimpered. "What shall I do without you? Oh, my God, let me die too!"

"May darling," I said, as I took her strong young hand in mine, "you will make me really ill if you give way like this. You have seen so little of sickness, my dear, that you imagine it to be much worse than it is. I fancy I have carried home some of the Genoese malaria with me. It is very unfortunate, but all I have to do is to lie here quietly and take my medicine till I get well again. You won't retard my recovery by making me unhappy, will you, May?"

Her aunts and grandmother joined their persuasions to mine, until, between us, we had quite blinded my darling's eyes to the fact of there being any danger in my illness; and then I was satisfied and content to take whatever Heaven might see fit to send me.

And Heaven was very merciful. There followed a period of much pain and sleeplessness and a little unconsciousness, during

which I was faithfully nursed by my dear child and my sister, Mrs. Delancey; and at the end of a fortnight I was pronounced convalescent, and allowed to leave my bedroom. But the weakness that supervened was so startling that the doctor shook his head discontentedly, and advised my instant removal from Dublin.

"We must send you to some bracing seaside place in England, madam," he remarked on that occasion. "This country is much too enervating for your constitution, and it will take some little time to cure the mischief Genoa did you."

Secretly I was pleased at the idea. I should have my own child to myself again. But it only wanted a fortnight to the time of the Drawing-room, and, although I had, of course, given up all idea of attending it myself, I felt I could not take May away before she had been presented.

"I can go to England the beginning of June, doctor, but not before."

"You must go before. It is absolutely necessary. You must go at once."

"I can't go at once. My daughter is to be presented on the 24th, and so many preparations have been made for the occasion, I could not think of upsetting them by taking her away."

"Then you must go without your daughter."

"Without May? Oh! doctor, I couldn't."

"Well, madam, all I can say is, your health depends upon your leaving Dublin at once—to-morrow—to-day, if it were possible. If your daughter's presentation is of more consequence than your life, stay for it; but if not, you must leave her behind or take her with you."

"But, doctor, you perplex me sadly. Can it really be so serious as that?"

"It is so serious, madam, that I am going

at once to speak to Lady Power and Mrs. Delancey, and tell them that if they do not see my directions carried out I cannot answer for the consequences."

I almost laughed at the idea, for I only felt weak and disinclined to exert myself; but half an hour afterwards, Juliet entered my room with a face full of anxious concern, and eager to persuade me to leave at once.

"The doctor says your pulse is terribly low, dear Katie, and that we are not to lose an hour in sending you to the seaside. It's a great worry, of course, and just at this time, too; but it must be done, and the sooner the better. What do you think of Brighton? It is the most bracing air I know of."

"But, Juliet, how can I put off May's presentation? What will Lady Power say? After all her kindness, too."

"But why need it be put off? You could not have gone, any way."

"You mean that I am to go away without her?"

"I am sure it will be the best thing to do. You shall not go alone, Katie. I will go with you; and we shall, of course, take Parker."

"And leave May behind with her grandmother?"

"And leave May behind with her grandmother," repeated Mrs. Delancey.

"She will never consent to it," I said decidedly. "May would break her heart if I were to go without her. It is useless to think of it, Juliet. It cannot be."

"Don't you think we could talk May into it, Katie?"

"I am sure you couldn't. Why, she has never been really separated from me in her life; and to part us now, when I am ailing. It would drive my poor child half crazy."

"I think, if the matter is put before her in its proper light, that she may become

reconciled to it. You see, it's not like an every-day occurrence, Katie, that has but to be put off till next week. If Frances—I cannot get out of the way of calling her by that name—is not presented this season she must wait till next. And, between you and me, that dress from Worth's cost a hundred pounds, although all the lace belonged to my mother."

"I dare say it did," I answered carelessly. The dress appeared of very little consequence in my eyes. "And of course it is very unfortunate I should have been so stupid as to fall ill at this juncture; but it can't be helped, so what are we to do?"

"But you acknowledge the absolute necessity of your going away, dear?"

"Yes, I suppose so—since the doctor says I must."

"Well, then, that's settled, and I shall start with you to-morrow. And now with regard to Frances. Have I your leave to

persuade her to stay at Gentian's Cross, if I can?"

"Oh! certainly," I replied, smiling to myself. "Persuade her by all means, *if you can.*"

But in my secret heart I felt sure her attempt would fail.

Juliet called Parker, and having given her a few directions for the morrow, departed in search of May.

I awaited the issue of her mission with some little anxiety. I was afraid my child would feel the disappointment of putting off the Drawing-room ball on which she had been reckoning so long.

In about a quarter of an hour the door of my room opened gently, and May appeared upon the threshold. I saw, by her flushed face and tell-tale eyes, she had been crying. I held out my weak arms to her, and in another moment she was in them.

"Well, my pet," I said lovingly, "and are you very much disappointed?"

"Terribly, dear mother. Fancy your having to go away! It frightens me awfully, though Aunt Juliet says there is no need."

"Aunt Juliet is right, my darling. There is no need of fear. Change of air is all I require to make me strong again. But I am thinking of you, my own child, and of this Drawing-room. It worries me so that I should be the cause of annoyance to you, or Lady Power."

"Don't let it worry you, dear mother. Of course it won't be a bit the same to me, but I'll do the best I can to get through it without you; and as soon as ever it is over I shall come and join you."

I started—just a very little. They *had* persuaded her, then. But I would not have let her see my disappointment for the world, for it was utterly selfish. I was ashamed of

the feeling even whilst it passed through my heart.

"What has Aunt Juliet been saying to you?" I inquired softly. "Tell me all about it."

"Not much, mother dear. She told me first what the doctor had said—that it was absolutely necessary you should leave Dublin at once; and at first I wanted to go with you, of course."

"Of course! I knew you would!" I echoed triumphantly, as I squeezed her tightly in my arms.

"But grandmamma and Aunt Juliet told me how much you wished me to remain and be presented; and I suppose, after all the fuss they've made, and the trouble they've been put to about it, it would be a pity to throw it up for the sake of a few days. Still, mother darling, I'm miserable at the thought of your going away without me, and unless Aunt Juliet were going with you, nothing

on earth should make me stay behind; and I shall come soon, shan't I? You will send for me as soon as ever the Drawing-room is over, won't you?" my darling added, as she burst into tears upon my bosom.

I was quite content that she should remain at Gentian's Cross then, however much might feel it. I soothed and comforted her with every soft and loving word in my vocabulary, and embraced her over and over again, as I assured her I should count the hours till we were reunited. I succeeded so well, that in a few moments, with the elasticity of youth, she was smiling through her tears, and planning all sorts of projects for our mutual enjoyment at the seaside.

But she shed tears again on more than one occasion before that day was concluded, and so fearful was I of witnessing her emotion when we should actually part, that I quite longed for the moment to be over.

It had been arranged between the doctor

and the Powers that Juliet should take me to Hastings; and the next day, at an early hour, I was lifted into the carriage, and we set off upon our way.

I will not detail the parting between my own child and myself. I cannot! It was exquisitely painful then; it is far more painful to remember now.

* * * * *

We made the long, fatiguing journey by tedious stages, in consideration of my weakness, and Juliet did all she could by kindness and attention to beguile the way.

I was too seriously inconvenienced on the journey, and too utterly prostrated by its effects, to have much leisure at first for fretting over my separation from May. As soon as I arrived at Hastings they put me into bed, and I did not leave it for several days.

But as soon as I had overcome the primary weakness and exhaustion conse-

quent on my removal, I became painfully conscious of the dull, uncertain feeling of disappointment that was feeding on my heart. Selfish, exacting mother that I was!

How hateful, on a closer inspection, did my eager jealousy appear to myself!

What, then, would I have had my bright young daughter abandon the prospect of gaiety just opening before her, to chain herself down to my sick-bed?

Would I have permitted her to relinquish what, in her position as the heiress of Gentian's Cross, was almost a public duty, to gratify a private inclination, which was, after all, not a necessary one?

No, no! Both my heart and my reason repudiated the idea with indignation.

My darling was much better where she was—the light and the sunshine of the old house, as she would be the greatest attraction of the ball-room—than wasting her loveliness in my weak, stupid company,

down at an uninteresting seaside place. Juliet and Parker could, and did, do all and more for me than I required; yet I could not help wishing, in a kind of silly, maudlin way, sometimes, that my own child had required *just a little more* persuasion before she yielded to their advice and mine.

Oh, my selfish, greedy heart! would it always go on in this way, longing to have everything in the world for itself—hating to share its possessions with any one—thinking it must be first and foremost wherever its affections were placed?

Yet, my child! my own, own child! what had I in this life to comfort me but her? Was it to be wondered at if I grudged one moment of her company to others?

CHAPTER XXVIII.

LETTERS!

As soon as we were fairly settled in Hastings, it may be well believed I took no such interest in anything as I did in the news that reached me by the daily post.

May's letters—and my darling wrote every day—were something like letters, and being the first I had ever received from her, possessed an unusual attraction for me. Each morning her envelope would contain three to four sheets of closely-written paper, detailing every circumstance of her life, which, with reading over and over again, and answering by slow and sometimes painful stages, were almost sufficient to fill up the measure of my mono-

tonous and weary days. If I had passed a bad night, or waked before the country post was in, I became feverish with anticipation, or fearful that the postman had already passed our door. Once, when, by some accident, my darling missed writing to me, I suffered a relapse from fretting and suspense; and all the time I was counting the hours till the Drawing-room should be over, and May free to join me again.

She told me everything that occurred to her. Nothing could have been more minute, at first, than her description of the places she went to, the people she met, and the presents Lady Power lavished upon her. To-day, it was a watch set with brilliants, that had been one of her grandmamma's wedding presents; to-morrow, a horse, that May might learn the art of riding, for which purpose a master had been engaged to attend every morning at Gentian's Cross; or it was a new dress, or a flounce of old lace—or some

ornament, luxury, or attention intended to do honour to the heiress of the Powers.

"Mamma seems to be launching out pretty freely," said Juliet, laughing, one day after I had read her May's letter. "She will altogether turn that little puss's head, if you don't take care. Diamonds for a child of that age! It's perfectly absurd! She never did a quarter so much for one of her own daughters."

"I have always heard it said that women are fonder of their grandchildren than of their own children, though I cannot understand it," I answered with a faint smile.

"Mamma appears to be, at all events. I hope she won't spoil May."

"She *cannot* spoil her!" I replied quickly. "You have heard how, in the midst of describing all her new treasures, she harks back to the one idea of joining me here. May would leave them all to-morrow to come to her mother."

"I should hope so!" said Juliet gravely. "Does she mention the dinner party at Lady Carrigan's?"

"No! it is strange, but she seems to have forgotten it."

But May had not forgotten it. In her next letter she said, "Were you surprised, dearest mother, that I did not tell you about Lady Carrigan's dinner? The fact is, I never went. Granny thought at the last that she had better not take me to so large a party before I had been introduced. So she and Aunt Margaret went alone, and I was not a bit disappointed. Fancy who took Aunt Margaret down to dinner! You'll never guess! *Lord Eustace Annerley!* Granny says he inquired a great deal about me, and was surprised to hear I was going to be introduced so soon. He is to be at the ball, and I believe Granny invited him to come and see her here; but I hope to goodness he won't, for I'm sure I shan't be civil

to him. I have always thought he behaved so ungratefully to you, after all your kindness to him, cutting away from Brussels as he did last year, and never coming near or writing to us again, after pretending to be such tremendous friends too! However, I know you like him, darling mother, so I'll try not to snub the creature, for your sake, but hope we shan't see too much of him all the same. By the way, I've got a bit of bad news to tell you, darling, and that is, I shan't be able to get away as soon after the presentation as I thought I should. I spoke to Granny about it this morning, and she says she must give a few dinner parties to introduce me to the county people; and then I suppose there will be their stupid visits in return. And all the time I am burning with impatience to get back to my own mammy, and wait on her as I used to do. But you are getting much stronger, dear, Aunt Juliet says, and we are all so thankful for that.

It was charming to hear you had been out in a bath-chair! How soon will your own child be walking by the side of your chair, I wonder! Very, very, very soon she hopes, unless you have discarded them altogether before she gets to Hastings, which will be better still. There now! that man has actually called! The servant has just brought in his card to me (Lord Eustace, I mean), with a request from granny that I will go down to the drawing-room! And it is just post-time, so I cannot wait to tell you what he says to-day, but I will to-morrow, darling, so good-bye till then."

I *was* much stronger; but the reception of this letter nearly threw me back again. I had concluded that Lord Eustace Annerley was with his family in Wicklow. I had had no reason to think otherwise, but I had never supposed he would have tried to gain an entry to Gentian's Cross, particularly when he knew that if I were not at the

moment resident there, he had every chance of meeting me some time or other. At first I called him cruel, hard, unfeeling, voluntarily to place such an obstacle in the way of my forgetting him. Then, remembering the circumstances under which I had dismissed him, my heart softened, and I began to wonder whether, in trying to renew our acquaintanceship, he had any hope of removing the impression I had permitted him to retain, that I myself was heartless, frivolous, and deceitful. To a man like Lord Eustace, immersed in all manner of gaiety, the attractions of Gentian's Cross could not be so great in themselves as to preclude all suspicion of an ulterior motive in his desire to visit there. In a few days I found that my sister-in-law shared this opinion with me. I did not read to her the extract from May's letter which I have given above. It had so startling an effect on me that I was afraid lest she might connect it with the cause. It took me a

couple of days to regain what I had lost after the reading of that letter; and it shocked me to find that twelve months had made so little difference in my feelings, as to permit the thought of the possibility of meeting Lord Eustace Annerley again to disturb my equanimity. Juliet grieved over the consequences, and worried herself to find out whether they proceeded from cold, or indigestion, or any other of those molehills that turn into mountains for an invalid; but she never guessed the true reason that I relapsed.

Indeed, so well did I conceal it, that a few days afterwards she started the subject herself.

"I have heard from Margaret," she said to me. "Has May mentioned to you that your old Brussels friend, Lord Eustace Annerley, has been calling at Gentian's Cross?"

"Oh, yes! She sent me a long description of his visit."

"You have not been so intimate with him lately, have you?"

"No! He left Brussels last year, and we lost sight of him."

"Your friendship did not extend to correspondence, then?"

"Oh, dear, no!"

"But you liked him very much, Katie, didn't you?"

"Yes! I did, but May didn't," I answered with an effort.

"Oh! May was a baby then. She will alter all her likes and dislikes now. He's good-looking, isn't he?"

"Most people think so."

"And his age?"

"How curious you are!" I said, with a faint smile. "The same as Hugh's would have been had he lived—thirty-eight."

"As old as that! Indeed! Mamma and Margaret seem to have taken a great fancy to him. They declare him to be everything that's charming. And he appears to be very attentive to May."

"He was always kind to May," I replied, remembering, with a guilty throb, for whose sake he had loved her. "And she was an ungrateful chit not to like him in return."

"She will get over that," said Juliet. "I should think, from your description and Margaret's, that Lord Eustace was not a man to try to make friends with any one in vain. I wonder we have never met him before; but I suppose he has chiefly lived abroad. His father, Lord Riversdale, was well known to my father, and as you have heard, Lord Eustace was at school with poor Hugh. Their estates are good, but there's not much money in the family. But then they have blood to make up for it, you know, and that is everything. Is Lord Eustace what is called a marrying man, Katie?"

I blushed up to my eyes. Why was my sister-in-law questioning me after this fashion? I could not disabuse my mind of

the idea that she had really guessed or heard something of the affair between Lord Eustace and me, and wished to ascertain the truth. If—I asked myself quickly—if the Power family all liked him and approved of the match, and May really should (as Juliet had suggested) alter all her former likes and dislikes, would it be lawful for me then to indulge my heart's desire, and consent to marry him? How my unchastened nature throbbed once more at the idea! Oh, Hugh! forgive me!

"Is he a likely man to marry?" repeated Mrs. Delancey.

"I should think he was," I answered, trembling. "More than once he spoke to me of the necessity of marriage to a man in his position. He is the eldest son, you know. He will be Lord Riversdale."

"Of course! That is what mamma says. Well, I hope, Katie dear, that May *will* get over her girlish nonsense about him, for

your sake," she said, as I thought, significantly. "She seems to be in a fair way to do so, if we may trust Margaret's account," she added, laughing, as she left the room.

I lay on my sofa with burning cheeks, wondering how much or how little Juliet knew, and who had been the person to enlighten her on a subject which I had breathed to no one. As soon as I was alone again I drew the packets of May's letters from under the cushion at my head, and read over the description she had sent me of Lord Eustace's visit to Gentian's Cross.

"He seemed awfully pleased to see me, mothie," she wrote, in her girlish style of diction, "and after a little while I think I was rather glad to see him too. It looked so like the dear old Brussels times to see him sitting opposite with his great eyes that you used to be so cross with me for abusing. He asked after you, of course—I would have turned the wretch out of doors if he

hadn't—and I told him you had had malaria, and gone to the sea for change of air. He was surprised to find I had grown such a woman—the stupid! as if I should be anything else at my age—and asked me if I thought *he* had grown too. I told him he had grown the wrong way: and indeed he really does look younger than he did in Brussels, mothie. He has shaved off his beard, and it's *such* an improvement. Granny told him I was going to learn to ride; and he said he would come and give me some lessons himself if she liked, and I liked too. I was just about to say I wouldn't have him, when I remembered all my naughtiness in Brussels, and thought I would show you how improved I am. So I bowed and said, "*Thanks! very much!*" with quite the tone and air of the Dublin ladies; and granny and he settled it between them, and I believe he's coming tomorrow morning.

"Dearest mother! I'm getting so excited! It wants only two days now to the ball—and then a few stupid parties—and then I shall come to my own, own mother, and *never*, *never*, *never* leave her again for the thousandth part of a minute."

I smiled over the last enthusiastic sentence, and kissed the dear handwriting fondly. It was balm of Gilead to my weary spirit even whilst I smiled at it. But Juliet was right. My girl was certainly getting over her aversion to our friend; trying hard to like him, as she said, for my sake. Dear, dear child!

If she *did* grow to love him—and if, when we all returned to Ireland together, Eustace and I *should* meet again and renew our interrupted friendship—what might *not* come to pass?

I lay back on my pillows, exhausted with even this slight emotion, and gave myself up to idle, happy dreams, forgetful of all

my resolutions, and of the utter want of interest displayed in me or my affairs by Lord Eustace Annerley since we had parted.

The next few days were very exciting ones for us poor exiles by the sad sea waves, for in them we received long accounts from May and Lady Power—accounts which brought the foolish tears to my eyes because of my inability to join in the scenes which they described—in which we heard of how beautiful my darling had looked at the Drawing-room, and how immensely she had been admired at the ball, and how invitations for different parties were now pouring in upon her from all quarters of Dublin.

"And, amongst others, I have renewed my acquaintance with the family of Lord Riversdale," wrote Lady Power to her daughter, "who are staying in Dublin for the season. The mother has been dead, as

you know, for years, but the earl's daughter, Lady Selina Annerley, does the honours of the house, and May and I dine there next Tuesday week."

"Next Tuesday week!" I exclaimed in consternation; "I shall never get my child back at this rate, Juliet. I think Lady Power might be a little more considerate, when she knows how ill I am."

"Well, I think you could *hardly* have expected May to leave Dublin directly after her presentation, Katie," was my sister-in-law's reply.

"It is her own wish to come. She is longing to join me."

"Doubtless, but we can't always do as we wish in this world. For my own part, I felt certain this would be the upshot of her *début*. It would seem almost ridiculous to present a beautiful heiress like Frances publicly to the world, and then immediately send her out of the country before any one

has the opportunity to show her any civility."

"Then I ought to have been told of it before. Her *début* might have been put off till next year."

"I don't think Frances would have liked that, Katie."

"She would like to do anything that I asked her to do. She has never disobeyed or neglected me in her life."

"I am sure she has not. But it does not follow it would not have been a disappointment to her. At all events, she seems to be enjoying herself now. Mamma says she was the life of the room at Lady Claretown's."

"My darling! How I wish I could see her, if only for a moment," I said, with weak tears.

"Now, Katie, don't give way. We shall have the child here now before you are able to enjoy her company; or, if not,

we will go back to her, which, after all, will be, I think, the wiser thing to do. It seems such a pity to cut short her first taste of gaiety."

"I get on so slowly," I said, with a sigh.

"Oh! no, you don't. You can walk across the room quite firmly now to what you did a few days ago. You are getting on famously. I dare say we shall be back at Gentian's Cross by the beginning of July."

"You are too good to me," I said, as I kissed her. "Here am I keeping you from your husband and your children, and the London season, and treating you to all my ill-humoured airs and graces, and you never so much as scold me in return."

"Don't be a goose, Katie," replied Juliet, returning my embrace. "You have nothing to thank me for. You have always been dearer to me than a sister."

* * * * *

My child's letters still came regularly every morning to brighten my wearisome day, but after her presentation I fancied I detected a slight change in them. They were as affectionate as ever, but they seemed to me more hurried, more reticent, less detailed, than they used to be, and the little difference worried me. Juliet laughed at what she called my ridiculous nonsense, reminding me that May went out oftener, stayed up later, and slept longer in the morning probably, than she had ever done in her life before, which was ample explanation (if any were needed) for her sending me shorter and less carefully written letters. Yet I was not quite satisfied. My senses, sharpened by overweening anxiety and affection, felt that although my child apparently related all that she did, said, and saw, she was keeping back something of greater importance than all the rest. Could it possibly be that she had become

so engrossed and fascinated by the new world she had just entered upon, that she desired to retard rather than hasten the moment of our meeting again? I had made myself delightfully miserable brooding over this idea, which I would not do my own child the wrong of confiding even to Juliet, when the mystery was cleared up in the very last way in the world that I anticipated.

Four weeks had now elapsed since the day of my darling's presentation. Party had succeeded party to prevent her joining me at Hastings, and Lady Power's whole time appeared to be taken up in writing letters to prove how utterly impossible it was that May should leave Dublin for the present; and my heart and soul were growing sick with waiting and longing for her. Still I had complete faith in her ultimate appearance, and hope carried me on from day to day, whispering that by the next

post she might be able to fix the time of starting.

I had observed for the last week or ten days that Juliet had received several letters from home the contents of which she had not confided to me, but I knew from her beaming face and cheerful manner that all must be well, and cared for no other news than such as my darling chose to send me.

Four weary, weary weeks, and then came the solution of the mystery.

One morning I received the following note from my daughter :—

"My own sweet Mother,

"I am so excited, I hardly know how to write to you; but of course granny will tell you all about it, and it shall be exactly as you wish. I know you'll have a good laugh over it, because of Brussels; but I'm not such a fool as I was then, darling, and

it's everything to me that you like him. Granny says I'm awfully young; but you were younger, and it was all right, so I don't see why this shouldn't be, too. Only *you* must say so, or it will be all wrong. For, whatever happens, you must always be the *very*, *very* first person in the world to me, and so I tell him. But I fancy you will be *very pleased*, dearest mothie, and only think I'm not half good enough for your paragon. I shall only wait to get your answer to this before I start for Hastings, for, as I tell granny, this is the very time of all times that I must have my mother with me. Write by return, darling mammy, and don't scold me very much.

"Ever your own loving child,

"MAY.

"P.S. It's awfully sudden, isn't it? but granny says it will be a good thing to sober me, and she thinks my head would have

been turned if I had gone on much longer as I have done this last month.

"P.P.S. I'm trying to like him very hard, and really I do a little. You should see how awfully polite I am to him when we're alone. Quite sentimental, I assure you."

* * * * *

I read this letter through four or five times without stopping to think about it, and then I called hastily to my servant.

"Parker, go and ask Mrs. Delancey to come here *at once!* Say I *must* speak to her—make haste."

"Nothing wrong at home, I hope, madam?"

"Oh no! no! only see I must Mrs. Delancey."

Parker flew off on her errand, and, in another minute, Juliet, wreathed in smiles and with her hands full of letters, came into my room.

"Juliet, what *is* the meaning of this?" I said, as I held out May's letter towards her.

"Hasn't May told you, then?"

"My dear—no! What is it? I can't understand a word of her letter. It's incoherent from beginning to end. *Do* tell me. What has happened?"

"Nothing but good news, Katie, so don't agitate yourself. You will be as proud as a peacock when you hear it. I was certain it was coming a week ago, but I didn't dare tell you, for fear of the effect a disappointment might have upon you at present. But it's all right now, dear."

"But what is it? Where is Lady Power's letter? I've never received it!" I exclaimed anxiously.

"I have just brought it you. It was sent in with mine by mistake. Now, Katie, you mustn't tremble so. Prepare yourself for a great surprise. Frances has received a most excellent proposal."

"A proposal, already?"

"Yes; and one of which you may justly be proud. You cannot but approve of it—it will be the grandest match in the county. And the girl appears to be as pleased as everybody else."

"But *who*—who is it?" I gasped.

"Can't you guess? You blind little bat! Who but your great Brussels chum—whom you were so sure May didn't like (you silly Katie!)—Lord Eustace Annerley! What do you say to that now?"

I didn't say anything to it. I neither said, nor saw, nor heard anything more. The shock, in my weak state, was too much for me, and I fainted.

CHAPTER XXIX.

"DO YOU LOVE HIM?"

WHEN I recovered my senses, the bedroom window had been thrown open, my hair and forehead were wet with perfume, and Parker was vigorously fanning me.

"So tiresome!" I heard Juliet's voice exclaim; "and when Mrs. Power was getting on so nicely, too. What can have caused it? Are you sure she slept well last night, Parker? and did she take her medicine regularly?"

"What is it all about?" I inquired, shivering under the unaccustomed chill.

"Oh! nothing, dear, nothing!" replied Juliet, with the ready deceit which is always

thought justifiable in the case of an invalid. "How do you feel now, Katie?"

"I am all right," I said, in a weak, bewildered manner; "but I must have slept very late. How high the sun is! and why —why am I on the sofa?"

"You have been a little ill, dear."

"A little ill!—a little ill!" I repeated vaguely. But here my eyes, roving aimlessly about the room, fell upon the packet of opened letters piled upon the toilet-table. In a moment the whole truth had come back to me. I groaned, and turned my face upon the sofa-cushions.

"What is the matter, Katie? What are you thinking of?" asked Juliet anxiously.

"Oh! do leave me alone!" I said. "Do leave me by myself! I am tired; I wish to sleep."

Of course my sister-in-law had a thousand and one objections to make before she would comply with my request. She was afraid I

should faint again, or fall off the sofa, or want things which I could not procure for myself. At any rate, she begged that the maid might remain within call, so that I might summon her at a moment's notice.

But I would have none of it. I steadily refused to allow either Juliet or Parker to be witness of the way in which I faced this mortal agony.

I continued to reiterate my desire to be left by myself until they attributed my obstinacy to the captiousness attendant on convalescence, and consented to humour it. After arranging my cushions and tucking shawls about my feet, the door closed upon them and I was alone. I had listened for the sharp click that should herald my freedom of action feverishly, and as soon as it fell upon my ear I threw off the wraps with which my kind nurses had encumbered me, tottered from the sofa, turned the key in the door, and sat down again with the letters

from Ireland in my lap, and my head in my hands, trying to realise the intelligence I had just received. After the first shock, the news, instead of weakening, seemed to strengthen me. My hands trembled, it is true, and my senses were confused; but as I sat there I felt strong enough for anything, even to rush back to Dublin and tear my darling from Lord Eustace's sacrilegious arms. But the primary object I had in view was to collect my scattered thoughts, and try to unravel the puzzle so suddenly presented to me, and to think—think—think, and comprehend what was going to happen and what was the best thing to be done.

It is very difficult to write down our sensations under various circumstances in black and white. It is like attempting to describe the perfume of a rose; to put into hard unfeeling words the tints of a sunset sky. All I can remember of the hour I allude to is that my paramount feeling was one of dismay

that my own child was so soon to be *my own* no longer. Very few people can realise what parents feel at giving up the creature they have brought into the world, and looked upon throughout its infancy, and childhood, and budding youth as part and parcel of themselves, to the care and dominion of another. It is hard to resign one's son to another woman—harder still to deliver over one's daughter to another man. Most parents worthy of the name suffer slightly at such a crisis: some suffer very deeply; and I thought, and still think that no one ever suffered more under it than I did myself.

To give up my May, my darling, who had been my sole thought, and care, and happiness for sixteen years, to a husband—to resign all future claim to directing her actions, or employing her time, or occupying her attention—this, of itself and under any circumstances, would have been a bitter enough trial for me to struggle against.

Still it was natural, it was but what I had expected and regarded as a certainty, if not to occur so soon, at least in the course of a few years. This disappointment, then, I could have wrestled with as a weakness unworthy of me, and overthrown; but the other fact—the fact of the man to whom my daughter was about to give herself—was utterly beyond the strength of my nature to regard with calmness. I *could not* believe it. May engaged to, and about to marry Lord Eustace Annerley—Lord Eustace, who but twelve months back was so earnestly soliciting me—*me,* her mother, a woman just twice her age—to be his wife instead!

It was monstrous—incredible—not to be heard of! There appeared to me to be something sacrilegious and revolting in the idea that the lips that had sworn fidelity to the mother should repeat the same words to the daughter—that the man who had spoken of being a father to my child should become her

husband—that I, whom he had implored to be his wife, should stand to him in the position of a mother!

I was so weak still that, as the thought of the last situation rose up in my mind, all its ludicrousness and apparent absurdity tickled my sense of the humorous, and I actually laughed at it; but the laughter brought tears, and to tears succeeded indignation, so that I was ready to rise from my couch and stamp about the room, and declare that it could not and it should not be.

What had I done that Lord Eustace Annerley should dare to insult me in the midst of my family? In what way had I so much injured him that he should seek to revenge himself upon me through my dearest possession—the person of my innocent child? I allowed this idea to surround and absorb me until I had worked myself into a state bordering on frenzy, and every circumstance of the case became altered and distorted in my jealous eyes.

Lord Eustace was no longer merely a faithless lover too quickly transferring his allegiance from one woman to another, but a fiend in the shape of man who was determined to repay me for the disappointment I had unwillingly caused him by putting me to shame in the person of my daughter, and keeping the self-inflicted wound I had incurred for her sake continually open and bleeding. When I had arrived at this pitch of reasoning, I seemed to have but one desire—to get back as quickly as I could to Ireland, and open my darling's eyes to her danger. I was not thinking of May then, I was thinking of myself. It was mad jealousy, that my child should win and wear the love it had cost me so much to resign, that possessed me. May Heaven forgive me! How could I have been jealous of my May—Hugh's sweet, last legacy to me?

Yet here I feel I must write down the truth, whatever it may cost me; else, where

were the use of my transcribing my sad history at all? And, looking back calmly and dispassionately on the events of that sad time, I know that I was less anxious for my daughter's welfare than for the satisfaction of my own feelings of disappointment and wounded vanity. I thought and said, and really believed (so deceptive is our human nature), that it was May's happiness for which I feared; but reflection, and self-examination, and prayer have taught me that in that—as in all other things—I have been lamentably imperfect. I rang my bell violently, and desired Parker to summon Mrs. Delancey. When she appeared I told her I had made up my mind at once to quit Hastings and return to Dublin. Juliet was thunderstruck. She did not consider me fit to undertake the journey, nor could she see the necessity for my leaving the seaside just as the fresh salt breezes were commencing to

have some effect on me—just, too, as May was at liberty to join me there.

"You will undo all the good of the last month, Katie, if you continue obstinate," she said persuasively. "And even if Frances does delay her visit here for a week or two, it will be but natural, you know, and what one must expect under the circumstances. You have not yet told me what you think of this grand engagement, but you are very much delighted—I am sure of that."

"Juliet, it is because of this engagement that I must return to Gentian's Cross. I *must* see May, and sound her on the subject of her feelings. How can I tell if she is mistaken or not? A girl of sixteen knows nothing about love, yet she will be miserable without it. I cannot rest till I have seen my child and ascertained all she thinks and feels."

"But she will come to you if you are patient."

"I cannot be patient. I have waited to see her four weeks and more, and my patience is exhausted. Juliet, it is of no use combating my resolution. I have determined to go back to Dublin, and the sooner we start the better. What is the time? How soon can we go? When does the next train leave Hastings?"

My sister-in-law found it impossible to combat my resolution with any success, and as my medical attendant considered that to thwart would be productive of worse consequences than to indulge me, I was permitted to have my own way; and the second evening after the receipt of the letters that had so much upset me found us at Holyhead waiting to cross in the packet. How strange it seemed to me that each time I had stepped on board that steamer it had been with the same feelings of distrust and fear—with the same wicked, rebellious doubt whether it would not be better for all parties concerned

in my troublesome existence if a great storm were to arise in the night and the vessel never to reach the opposite shore!

Worn out with the fatigue of the return journey, which had been undertaken with scarcely less weakness than it had been at first made, I slept but little on board the packet, and looked very unfit to go on to Dublin the next morning; but no persuasions could induce me to remain and rest at Kingstown. I was in a fever till I had clasped May in my arms and ascertained from her own mouth whether all I had heard was truth or a horrible, unholy dream.

I lay back in the railway carriage, as the train ran swiftly into the Dublin Station, with closed eyes and fingers locked in pain, wearily wondering how much more of my poor strength it would require to get me alive to Gentian's Cross, I was so thoroughly enervated by travelling. The

morning, though in June, had dawned dully and rather chill, and I had felt the difference in the atmosphere keenly. But as we arrived in Dublin the sun broke out bright and warm—a happy omen for any one less despondent than I was. But I was pondering only upon Lord Eustace Annerley—his last interview with myself.

"Look, Katie," said Juliet cheerfully, "what a lovely day we are going to have! I shall find it difficult to persuade you to go to bed, I expect, when we arrive at Gentian's Cross. Here is the station. Thank Heaven we have got over this tedious journey so well. And there—yes, actually there is that madcap Frances waiting on the platform for you. Why, at what unearthly hour can the child have risen to be here in time?"

At this intelligence every bitter thought I had encouraged was lost in the overwhelming tide of my maternal love. I rose

from my seat—I tottered from the carriage as soon as the train had stopped—I fell, speechless and trembling with excitement, into my own child's arms, and felt, whilst they remained willing to enfold me, *all the rest was nothing.* Oh! I *did* love my child heartily—fully—without lack or reserve. The few ill feelings which the fact of her being a woman like myself, and capable of winning the love which at so great a cost I had relinquished, had excited, had died in a moment and for ever as I gazed with eyes brimming over with tears of affection in her sweet intelligent, loving face, and thanked God who had given me such a treasure. Her strong young arms squeezed my weakened frame with an energy that gave me pain whilst she murmured the words, "Mothie dear! dear mothie!" again and again into my delighted ears. It was all sunshine then, both within and without. The blue June heaven was not less cloudy than my satisfied heart.

"Whoever expected to see *you* at the station?" said Aunt Juliet, as we all drove away together, May occupying the front seat beside me with her arm around my waist, devouring me every moment with kisses that poured new life into my veins more effectually than a dozen tonics could have done.

"Well, I hardly expected it myself," she answered laughing, "for when I proposed coming last night, grandmamma decidedly threw cold water on the idea, though I meant to meet you from the moment we received the telegram to say dear mothie was returning home."

"And how did you get your grandmamma's consent, then, my darling?" I inquired fondly.

"I never got it at all," answered May. "I took French leave, and came of my own accord. The carriage started at five this morning, so I had to be up pretty early.

But I would have risen at midnight sooner than miss the first sight of my own sweet mother's face! I wish it were less thin and pale, dear mothie! That Hastings can't be much of a place. It doesn't seem to have done you any good at all."

"Oh, yes, it has!" replied Juliet quickly; "you mustn't judge your mother by what you see to-day, Frances. She is tired out with her long journey and her anxiety to see you. And so you came to meet us without grandmamma's knowledge. Upon my word, young lady, you are getting on! I don't think your mamma or I would have dared to take such a liberty at the same age, eh, Katie? Is it on the score of this grand engagement that you've turned your own mistress, Frances?"

At these words I glanced with painful anxiety at my darling. I had not dared to mention her engagement to her. I had almost dared to forget it in the joy of meet-

ing her again. But Juliet's allusion recalled the bitter truth to me, and with it all my pain. I expected to see something like confusion on my young daughter's face at the first introduction of so delicate a subject; but with the exception of one bright triumphant blush, which made her look gloriously beautiful, she did not appear to be embarrassed by the allusion. On the contrary, her answer, though delivered saucily, was almost indifferent.

"I don't see what my engagement should have to do with it, Aunt Juliet; nor why you should call it 'grand.'"

"Don't you consider it so?"

"By no manner of means! nor Lord Eustace either."

"Oh, Frances! how unromantic you are! I expected to hear you deliver a rhapsody on him on the very first opportunity."

"Oh! you must look to dear mothie for that," cried my girl, as she turned and

embraced me anew. "She'll rhapsodise on him by the hour if you'll listen to her, won't you, darling? I confess I've been behaving rather well to him since you've been away—remarkably well, I think I may say, considering all things; but now you've come back I mean to return to my former style of behaviour, and leave all the compliments to you. I shan't be able even to *look* at anybody but yourself for the next month, mothie. It does seem such an age since you have been away."

I was thankful to drop the subject, and let my child wander from her train of thought into expressions of delight at our reunion. But Mrs. Delancey was too curious not to pursue it.

"I am not going to let you off in this way, Frances. Don't forget how little we have heard of this wonderful engagement, and have pity on my curiosity. Is he very good-looking, my dear?"

"Ask mothie," returned the girl, with a laugh; "*I* don't think him so."

"But you're very fond of him, I suppose?"

"Not half so fond as I am of *her*."

"You shouldn't say that, my May," I remonstrated, in a low, weak voice.

"But it's true, darling! and you know it is. How *could* I like anybody as well as I do you?"

"A husband should come first of all," remarked her aunt.

"Oh, bother husbands!" cried my child quickly, and she *did* blush this time. "For heaven's sake don't begin to talk of *them*, Aunt Juliet!"

"Why, my dear! has there been no mention of the subject yet then? Have not grandmamma and Lord Eustace said anything about the wedding-day?"

I felt my breath come shorter as I waited for May's reply. She grew confused, and

looked down, and began to plat the fringe of my travelling shawl.

"They *may* have," she said evasively.

"Oh! you rogue; you *know* they have!"

"Well, grandmamma *did* say something about the end of next month, but I was not going to agree to anything till mother came and said it was all right."

And my girl glanced shyly in my face as she concluded, as if to guess my sentiments before I uttered them. The end of next month! One month—and then the commencement of my desolation. I could not contemplate or realise it. I shut my eyes and shuddered.

"Mothie is ill!" cried May in alarm.

"It is only fatigue—the shaking of the railway," said Juliet, as she searched in her bag for perfume and a fan. I lay still and let them minister to me. I could not have spoken at that moment to save my life. I hardly spoke again until we reached Gentian's Cross.

I don't think Lady Power was over pleased at my unexpected return, but it was not a time to express displeasure. Whether with my will, or against it, I was conveyed to my bedchamber as soon as I arrived, in order that I might rest from the fatigues of my journey.

Rest! I felt as if there were no more rest in this world for me. May was kneeling beside my sofa, with her fresh, cool young cheek laid against my heated countenance. I knew I ought not to enter on exciting topics, but I could not help it, and as soon as we were alone I began,

"May, my own darling! tell me the truth, the *very*, *very* truth! *Do you love him?*"

I had seized her face between my hands, and was gazing into her eyes, down to her very soul. She could not turn away—she could not deceive me. She reddened up to the roots of her hair, but no glow of love came into those clear, grey, beautiful orbs.

"Well, of course I do, mothie—at least, I suppose I do."

"But to 'suppose,' won't do, my own child. You must be sure, *quite* sure, or you will be miserable for life. You don't know what an important step marriage is."

"How *can* I be quite sure when I've never had a lover before? I like him very well. I like him awfully, mothie. By the way, he gave me such a lovely locket yesterday, with my monogram on it in emeralds and opals. Opals are unlucky, aren't they, dear?"

"Heaven forbid!" I said, with a shudder. "But never mind the locket now, May. Tell me how you came to love Lord Eustace so quickly. When did you find it out?"

"I don't know. I didn't want to be engaged to him a bit, only grandmamma made such a fuss about it; and really their place in Wicklow is lovely, mother. Such

a park, I forget how many acres, but it's *enormous;* and the house is very respectable —at least it will be when he's had it properly done up. I mean to live at Gentian's Cross, though, when it's mine."

"You'll have to live where your husband chooses, my child," I said mournfully.

"Well, then, I'll make him choose Gentian's Cross, for it will be the same thing in the end. He's going to send an Arab over for me to ride next week. The best thing he does is riding. Mothie, you'll be quite astonished to see how I prance up and down the park! I think I like horses better than anything in the world—except *you*, my sweet, sweet old darling!" With another shower of kisses.

"But I want to hear about Lord Eustace, May," I said, with an effort, "and you run off upon horses."

"Well, they're much the nicer of the two," laughed May.

"My child! you will make me wretched if you talk like that. It's not right, dear; you should not jest on so serious a subject."

"I wasn't jesting. It's truth. Eustace is very nice, of course, and all that sort of thing; and he pays me—oh! *such* compliments, mothie, I scream sometimes to hear them!—but I *do* love riding!—it's the jolliest thing on earth!"

"May! May!" I cried again, "tell me the truth. Do you *love* Lord Eustace Annerley?"

My earnestness startled her; the tears in my eyes frightened her: she became sober in a moment.

"Now, darling old mum! don't alarm yourself, and I'll be serious. Yes, I *do!*—so there! I've quite altered my opinion of him since we were in Brussels. I think I was a little jealous in those days, darling, because he always stuck so close to you,

and you seemed to think him such a paragon. But now I see that he's an awfully handsome man, and a great favourite in society; and though we don't lay any stress upon titles, mother—we're not quite so snobbish as that, are we?—yet it's nicer, you know, to be Lady So-and-so, than plain Mrs. ——; at least I fancy you will like it for me. And then, marrying a man as well-off as Lord Eustace will enable me to be with you, and have you with me as much as ever I choose: and I believe that was the chief thing that made me like him. For I told him I would *never* leave you; and he said at once, of course I shouldn't, and we would all live together. So that's settled; and I'll be your spoilt baby to my life's end, darling, and take such care of you that you shall never fall sick again, or have any bother whatever! Say it's nice, dear mothie, and that you're very glad of it; and then—and then, I shall want

nothing more in this world to complete my happiness!"

She threw her dear arms round me as she spoke; her tears were on my cheek, her sweet face hidden against my own.

What could I do but press her closely to me, and pray God her future might prove happy.

How could I find time to groan in my inner spirit at the rapidity with which *he* seemed to have forgotten the past, when he had laid his present as a free-will offering at the feet of my own child, and she appeared so willing to accept it?

Only—even as I blessed her—my heart sunk beneath the fatal knowledge *that she did not love him!*

CHAPTER XXX.

"WHAT DID IT ALL PORTEND?"

THIS conviction gained such ground from subsequent conversations I held with my child during that day, that when the evening came, I felt I could contain myself no longer, and begged a private interview with Lady Power. I felt too ill to leave my bedroom, and, as I understood afterwards, my mother-in-law expressed some surprise at my summoning her there. But after a slight delay she entered statelily, and drew a chair with ceremonious politeness to the side of my sofa.

"Lady Power," I commenced nervously, (I had never quite got over my first im-

pressions of Hugh's mother), "I hope you will excuse my troubling you to come upstairs; but I want so much to talk to you about this engagement of dear May's. It is so sudden—so unexpected—and I have heard so little; I am sure you will understand my anxiety on the subject."

"I shall be most happy to give you any information you wish for, Katharine; but as for your feeling anxious, there is not the least necessity for that. I think you might trust *me* to look after our dear Frances's welfare in all things."

"Oh! I am sure of that—quite sure!—only I am her mother, you see, and of course—"

"She is my *heiress!*" interrupted Lady Power, grandly; "and it is incumbent on me, above all other people, to watch most carefully over her interests, and my own. The honour of my late husband's family is bound up in the career of that child!"

"Do you consider this marriage with Lord Eustace Annerley will be for her good?" I demanded anxiously.

"In what way, Katharine?"

"In every way. I know it is an advantageous match in point of position and advancement; but I have been questioning May closely to-day, and I cannot think, from her answers, that she really loves him."

"I think you were wrong to question her on such a subject. It was indelicate—unnecessary—"

"Unnecessary! Oh, Lady Power! how can the child be happy if she does not love her husband?"

"She will regard him quite as much as can be required, you may rest assured of that. Frances is too young yet to be able to analyse her feelings. I should be surprised if she did so. All that is necessary will come by-and-by."

"But supposing it never comes?" I suggested eagerly.

"Are you questioning the advantages of her marriage with Lord Eustace," demanded Lady Power, in a tone of surprise, "when it will be the grandest match of the season? He, heir to an earldom, and the possessor of some of the best estates in Ireland; and she, coming into the finest income in the country! Why, what can you be thinking of? What on earth could you desire more?"

"There is twenty-two years' difference between their ages," I said mournfully.

"What of that? Frances, it is true, is very young; but Lord Eustace Annerley is in the prime of life; and if a man of his standing and position chooses to honour so young a lady with his preference, no reasonable person will be found to raise an objection to the marriage. I consider that Frances, notwithstanding her beauty and

her expectations, is a very lucky girl—an uncommonly lucky girl—and so does everybody in and about Dublin; I can tell you that. She is the envy of every *débutante* of the season, and the marvel of their mothers."

"But supposing May never loves him," I repeated; "what will she do then? How will houses, and horses, and parks make up to her for the greatest want a woman can feel—the lack of affection?"

"Why should you doubt that she will love him, Katharine?" demanded my mother-in-law sharply.

"I don't know; I cannot tell; only I love her so much myself—and I cannot help being afraid."

"This is the most extraordinary thing I ever experienced in my life," returned Lady Power. "You—who were really nobody yourself, and did not bring sixpence to your husband—to cavil at a marriage for your daughter that a duchess might ac-

cept with thanks! Had it not been for me, Frances might have married as unfortunately as you did; and yet, instead of receiving the gratitude I have a right to expect in return, I am forced to listen to a string of complaints and unnecessary misgivings. You are most unreasonable, Katharine."

"I am sorry," I answered meekly; "but, Lady Power, you do not—you cannot know what I feel. She is my only child, remember! And though Hugh and I married so young—I was a year younger than dear May—yet we loved each other as fondly and passionately as many older people, and—"

"Katharine," said Lady Power, as she rose from her seat and shook out her skirts, "I would rather not hear any more upon this subject. You use words that shock me. I should not have alluded to your own marriage had you not provoked me to do so;

but you force me to say that I would rather Frances never married at all, than betrayed feelings so unbecoming to her sex and station in life as those you mentioned. I have lived many years longer in this world than you have, but I could not bring myself even now to use such expressions as you do, in reference to my own feelings. And when I consider your age at the time, Katharine, I blush for you!—really, I blush for you!"

"There is no need to blush," I answered hotly, though I was blushing myself at the same moment. "I only wish I could be sure my child loved Lord Eustace Annerley as I loved Hugh!"

"You will let me go now, Katharine, will you not?" said Lady Power, with an air as though she entreated her ears might not be further polluted by any strong speeches.

"One word, Lady Power. Nothing has

been settled about the time of the marriage, I suppose?"

"You must know very little of the proper thing to be done on these occasions, Katharine, if you suppose I acceded to Lord Eustace's proposals for Frances's hand without discussing the probable length of the engagement. He is not a boy. He has nothing to wait for. As soon as the necessary preparations can be completed, there is no reason the marriage should be delayed."

"Surely he might wait a twelvemonth," I replied. "May is such a child; it is cruel to part us so soon; and her education is not yet completed."

"It can go on as well after her marriage as before."

"But are *my* wishes nothing?" I cried bitterly. "Is her mother's happiness of no account? I seem to have been left out of the matter altogether, Lady Power."

It was not often I had ventured to speak to my mother-in-law so determinately. The tone of my voice seemed to take her by surprise; but she was equal to the occasion.

"You astonish me, Katharine. I fear your illness has made you regard things in a very strange light. If you love your daughter as you say you do, I should think that *her* happiness would be your first consideration. Lord Eustace also may be supposed to have some voice in the matter; and he and Frances have agreed to fix a day in the end of July or beginning of August for the celebration of their nuptials. I shall take upon myself, naturally, to see that the great event is properly conducted, and Frances, I have little doubt, will not be satisfied without your advice on all matters connected with the trousseau; so I trust you will strive to curb any little weak, foolish objections you may feel with respect to the time fixed, and not permit the desire

for your own selfish gratification to interfere with your daughter's happiness or your own recovery."

Lady Power, who had been on the eve of departure for the last ten minutes, here made a move towards the door.

Was I weak? *was* I selfish? was I really thinking only of myself and my own wishes, and not of my precious child's welfare or misery?

I covered my face with my hands, and tried to unravel the mystery of my mother-in-law's words.

Perhaps so; perhaps so! Guilty conscience awakened to remind me of my disappointed hopes and desires, and to ask why I should shrink from seeing my daughter accept what I had been so loth to resign myself.

"By the way," continued Lady Power, as she returned for a moment to my sofa, "I thought Lord Eustace Annerley was

such a great friend and favourite of yours in Brussels, Katharine. How comes it that you make objections to him now?"

"It's not to him, especially," I stammered in reply. "I am thinking of her—of my Hugh's child. I should never forgive myself if her marriage turned out an unhappy one."

"If that is all, you are quite safe in trusting *my* judgment in the matter," said Lady Power coldly, as she turned away again. "I do not consider our interview to have been a complimentary one to myself, Katharine. I shall try and forget it as soon as possible. Meanwhile I trust you will endeavour to bring some of your former opinions with regard to Lord Eustace to bear upon him in favour of your daughter's suitor."

What could she mean? How much, or how little, did she know of the intimacy that had existed between Lord Eustace and myself?

Lady Power's parting words set me thinking until my brain burned. Could *he* have betrayed me? Could *she* be correct in her analysation of my feelings?

The first suspicion I soon dismissed with the scorn it deserved. Lord Eustace might not have proved to be all I believed him, but he was a gentleman and a man of honour. Under any circumstances a woman's secret would be safe with him; under *these* circumstances, safest of all. But the second question was not so easily answered.

Did I shrink from the contemplation of this marriage because I feared Lord Eustace might not make my child a happy wife; or because I dreaded the effect of daily communication with him—and in so peculiar a position—on my own mind? God knows! I found it impossible to decide. Only I was sure of one thing—that if my own child's happiness could be secured by walking over my bleeding heart, I would bear

the suffering cheerfully, gladly, for her dear sake.

Her welfare, then, *was* the most precious thing on earth to me. When I had arrived at this conclusion I was, comparatively speaking, happy. I felt I had a little offering to make to Hugh; a little sacrifice of self to lay upon the altar of my love for him, in expiation of the unfaithful thoughts I had once held towards his memory. And the first rough place my wounded feet must tread in pursuing this path of duty appeared to be the absolute necessity of speaking to Lord Eustace myself, and ascertaining the reality of his affection for my child. The mere idea of this ordeal made me shrink. I knew it would be a terrible trial for me to go through; I hardly knew how I should do it; but I felt that, at any risks, it had to be done—and that without letting him guess how much it cost me to perform.

I had questioned May and Lady Power, and I had got no satisfaction out of either of them. My child had no ideas beyond the present moment; her grandmother, no ambition except to see her advantageously settled. It was left to me to probe the lover's heart, and see how deep the vein of his affection ran.

To me! *to me!*

I set my teeth together as I contemplated what lay before me; but I was firm in my resolve. I rang the bell for Parker, and desired her to assist me in my dressing. The bedroom had become a prison-house to me; I could remain within its four walls no longer. This was no time for inertion or indifference. How could I tell what they might not be doing downstairs during my absence?—whether the wedding-day might not be fixed, the trousseau ordered, and even the marriage celebrated, whilst I lay on my sofa grieving over the inevitable? I

think I must have had a little delirium in my brain that evening, so many queer fancies floated through it as I hurried on my dress. I know Parker was most earnest in her entreaties that I should not go downstairs, and that I combated all her persuasions successfully, even to preventing her summoning Juliet to the warfare.

They were all much astonished when I appeared amongst them in the drawing-room. They had finished dinner, and were sitting before their coffee, with all the windows open to the flower-garden. Juliet gave an exclamation of horror as I entered the circle; May, one of delight. I had half expected, half hoped, half feared, that the family party would have been increased by *one* that evening. I wished so much to meet him first amongst them all, that there might be no chance of my betraying what I felt; but he was not present. Even his

name was not mentioned. Perhaps Lady Power had cautioned her daughters on the subject. Any way, the merest commonplaces formed the only topics of conversation, and dinners, dresses, and characters were discussed until I felt weary and dispirited again, and had no alternative but to return to my room, where my child accompanied me. As we entered it, she dipped her fingers mechanically into the stoup of holy water which hung beside the door. Her action recalled another dread to me.

"May!" I exclaimed suddenly, "you know that Lord Eustace is a Protestant. How will you get on with a husband of different faith from your own?"

"Oh! he has promised not to interfere with my faith, mother," she said indifferently. "Grandmamma looked out for that, of course; and I believe there will be something put about it in the marriage settlements."

"I dare say there will; but I didn't quite mean that. How will you be able to sympathise with a person whose opinions are all diametrically opposed to your own? You know that there is no medium in this country. They are red-hot either one way or the other."

"I don't think Lord Eustace is 'red-hot' any way, mother. I don't believe he has any religion at all."

"But that is worse than anything, my darling. Oh! May, if he should make *you* careless, it would break my heart!"

"He shall never do that, mother. Do you suppose I could possibly forget all that you and dear Mère Anastase and the fathers have taught me?"

"No, darling, I hope not; or what your own dear father was, and would have wished you to be. It was for his sake I called you May, dear."

"You have told me so, mother. Besides,

you know grandmamma is as proud as Lucifer, and would never hear of any slight cast on the family faith; so don't you be afraid. Eustace may go to his old Protestant church as much as he likes; he will never get me there."

"But it might be the cause of a quarrel between you."

"Then he must quarrel, that's all."

"May, you make me wretched!"

"Sweet mother! it's only my fun! *Quarrel with me?* Why, he'd bite his head off first! He thinks I'm an angel of perfection, and can never praise me sufficiently. I believe he'd turn Catholic himself if I made a point of it. Did I show you the present of forget-me-nots he gave me?"

"No."

"I'll go and fetch them."

She sprang away as she spoke, and I turned to my sofa. The allusion to forget-me-nots had awakened an unpleasant re-

membrance in my bosom; but it mattered little. Each word that was spoken now seemed fraught with pain. I supposed it was inevitable and must continue so, at least for awhile. When I had met Lord Eustace and spoken to him, I fancied it would be better. In a few moments May returned, and placed a morocco case in my hands. I fancied that the shape was familiar to me. I opened it hurriedly. It contained the identical set of ornaments, wrought in blue enamel and gold, which he had pressed on my acceptance, and I had refused, the day he came from Paris and asked me to be his wife. My hand shook so at the discovery, that I could hardly hold the trinkets.

"Aren't they pretty?" demanded May innocently. "Did you ever see any like them before, mothie? He brought them from Paris expressly for me (so he says), as a *gage d'amour*. Romantic creature! I

believe he expected me to look sentimental over them, but I didn't. I like necklaces and earrings well enough; but sentiment is altogether beyond me. I leave that to you, mother."

"They are very pretty," I assented feebly, as I put the case back in her hands.

He had brought them from Paris expressly for *her*, as a *gage d'amour*. I could have respected him more if he had flung them into the sea. He must have foreseen that I should recognise them. What did it all portend?

CHAPTER XXXI.

I MEET LORD EUSTACE.

I LAY awake for many hours that night, cogitating on the probabilities of my first interview with Lord Eustace Annerley; when and where it would take place; what we should feel and what we should say; and of course everything happened quite differently from what I anticipated. It always does in this confusing world. I had not risen from my bed the following morning, when May came dancing like a sunbeam into my room.

"How are you, darling mother? Grandmamma has a letter from Eustace to say he will dine with us this evening. I knew the

creature would come poking here directly you came home. I believe the only reason he wants to marry me is, so that he may sit in your pocket for the rest of his life."

"May, my dearest, how wild you are! Any one who didn't know you might greatly misunderstand your meaning. Does not Lord Eustace often dine here?"

"Not very often, thank goodness! I hate to be stared and goggled at whilst grandmamma and Aunt Margaret and Aunt Blanche all pretend to look the other way. It's odious."

I tried to laugh it off.

"Lord Eustace must have altered very much from what he was in Brussels, my darling, if he so far forgets himself as to do anything to make you feel uncomfortable in public. He was so particularly reticent and quiet in society.

"Now, mothie!" cried May as she

stopped my mouth with kisses, "I'm not going to listen to a tirade of compliments on your paragon. I've gone the length of accepting him (all for your sake, darling!), but if I am to hear his name all day long I shall get sick of him before we are married. Grandmamma has given me such doses of him and Lady Selina, and Lord Riversdale and the estates in Wicklow, that I have begun to look upon the whole family as a species of Gregory's powder that will take a great deal of jam to make it go down. Besides, you will have Eustace to yourself in a few weeks, you know, and then you can pat each other on the back all day long. He'll be your son of course. Doesn't that seem funny, mother?"

"Very funny, my darling."

"Fancy having a son older than yourself! Won't it feel queer? Do you remember the first day you met him at the Chesters', when he had pulled me out of the

hole in the ice, and you were so cross because I said he was *old* and *black?*"

"Not *cross*, my May, only surprised. Grown up people look so different in the eyes of children from what they do in those of their equals."

"Yes! I see that *now*," said my girl, as she drew herself up with quite the air of being the equal of her *fiancé* and myself! "I don't think Eustace looks so old as he did then; but still he's more than double my age, and I often tell him he ought to be everlastingly obliged to me for taking compassion on such an old frump as he is!"

I could not help laughing.

"He must think you a very saucy girl, my May, and be very good to let you take such liberties with him."

The conversation was a great trial to me, and I found it easier to sustain by forced gaiety than in sober seriousness.

"Oh! as to that, I should be very much surprised to hear him make an objection to anything I did. He treats me just as if I were grown up, mother, I couldn't permit him to do otherwise," said my grandiloquent May.

"Of course not, darling! *I* don't think you grown up, my sweetest—you will *never* be grown up to me; but a girl who is old enough to be married is old enough to be respected, and I am very glad to find your engagement has made you so dignified and womanly."

"Oh! as to that," she repeated, "I dare say I should be giddy enough if Eustace were so too; he's too old to do anything but sit and gape at me. *Really and truly*," continued my child emphatically, "he is. Julia Bowers (I wrote to you once, you know, about having dined at the Bowers' with grandmamma) is engaged to such a nice young fellow, only two-and-

twenty, and they *do* have such fun together. Julia told me they are always skating or dancing or picnicking, and they're awfully fond of one another. But then he's only a clerk, you know, mothie, or something of that sort."

"What of that, dear May, if Julia loves him?" I asked anxiously.

"Well, they won't be able to marry for years to come, and then it will be a very scrubby sort of affair. Still I must say they seem to enjoy themselves. She danced with no one else at the last ball."

"Lord Eustace can dance—can he not?"

"I don't know whether he *can*. I know he doesn't. He stood by grandmamma the whole of that evening talking to her or me. And what's more, he prevented my waltzing. I *was* so cross!"

"How did he prevent it?"

"Told grandmamma he didn't think any woman should dance round dances (as if

men could dance them alone!), and that he should never allow his wife to do such a thing. And then grandmamma wouldn't let me accept any more partners! But I'll pay him out, some day!"

The defiant tone alarmed me.

"May, my own darling," I said earnestly as I squeezed her bonny head against my bosom. "Lord Eustace is not at all singular in his disapprobation of waltzing. Many men have the same dislike to seeing their wives and daughters spinning round the room in the arms of comparative strangers. It is far better he should be too careful of you than too careless. But you mustn't talk about 'paying him out.'"

"But I *shall*, mothie! I'd give up dancing if *you* asked me to do so, but I won't for him. Do you think I'm going to take all the trouble of marrying him, and then not to have my own way."

"But you must try to make his way

yours, May. You are bound to obey your husband in all things. You will have to promise to do so."

"Well, then, I'd better not marry him."

"I really think you'd better not!"

I did not feel then that my own selfish desires prompted this advice. Under any circumstances, it seemed a terrible thing to me that May should marry a man for whom she had evidently little affection. But I uttered the admonition so earnestly that I amused my child instead of impressing her. She burst out laughing.

"How solemn you are, dear mothie! one would think you really meant what you said. Of course I must marry the creature, and I dare say I shall obey him and all that sort of thing quite as much as is necessary, but, by hook or by crook, I mean to dance. And now are you going to get up, dear, or will you have your breakfast in bed? Do have it in bed, and let me wait on you as I used to do."

And for an hour afterwards my loving girl, to the scandal of Lady Power and her aunts, toiled up and down the big staircases, bearing various dainties which she thought would tempt my jaded appetite. The mere sight of her sweet fresh face, even under circumstances that caused me so much anxiety, was sufficient to give me new strength, and I regained more during that first day of my return to Ireland than I had done all the time at Hastings.

I confess I looked forward with great dread to the evening and coming presence of Lord Eustace, but I had determined to go upstairs early to dress for dinner, and not to descend again until the whole party was assembled. Thus I thought I should meet him first before May and all the Powers, and in such company I felt certain I should be able to command myself and behave like any ordinary being. I had been lying on a sofa in the drawing-room after luncheon, listen-

ing to my child's sprightly conversation, and gradually becoming more and more drowsy as the languid heat of the summer afternoon pervaded the shaded apartment, and the droning hum of the insects amongst the flowers came through the windows which, on the garden side, were opened to the ground. One by one my sisters-in-law slipped out of the room to pursue their several occupations; only May and I were left together, and the last thing I can remember is, my child placing another pillow under my head and quietly fanning me with a screen snatched from a neighbouring table. Then, I conclude I dropped off to sleep in beautiful unconsciousness that I was passing from one state to the other, and bright May, unable to stand the silence and solitude any longer, passed out into the sunlit garden so much more congenial to her youth and spirits, and left me sleeping on the sofa by myself.

* * * * *

Some one suddenly opened the door! I waked, with a start and an indistinct notion of where I was. Some one exclaimed, "I beg your pardon. I did not see any one was here." And the voice recalled me to the truth. I raised myself into a sitting posture; my whole countenance overspread with a burning blush.

It was Lord Eustace Annerley who stood before me. I recognised his figure and withdrew my gaze. I did not dare to raise my eyes to his—poor guilty creature that I was; the keen pang with which I had parted with him was so vivid in my remembrance, I could not but believe I should see it reflected in his face.

"Oh! Lord Eustace," I stammered lamely.

"Mrs. Power!" he ejaculated (and if he were acting, he acted so well there was no feeling but that of surprise apparent in his voice); "how glad I am to meet you again!

I was prepared for your coming, of course, but hardly to see you downstairs so soon. I hope you are very much the better for your change."

He had shaken my hand as he commenced speaking, and now he took a seat on the sofa beside me, and continued his airy *nonchalant* inquiries.

"I am better, thank you."

"A charming place, Hastings, is it not? So quiet and free from the nuisance of excursionists. In what part of the town did you lodge?"

I mentioned the terrace where we had had apartments.

"Ah! I know it. A very nice position. What a disappointment it must have been for you, having to go away just as your daughter was about to be presented."

"And about to be engaged," I added with a faint smile. It does not seem much to require courage to say, but those few words

were born of a very strong resolution on my part to be bold.

"And to be engaged!" repeated Lord Eustace calmly. "I hope you quite approve, Mrs. Power, of my determination to run off with your pretty May."

"I could never *approve* of that in anybody. It is too much to ask me to say—at all events so soon."

"But the idea is not distasteful to you?"

I saw the fingers which were lying interlaced upon my lap begin to tremble. I rose hastily, nearly upsetting my equilibrium by the unusual exertion and took a book off the table. Anything to handle and play with that might draw his attention off those wretched fingers.

"You have no objection to make to me personally?" said Lord Eustace, putting his question into another form.

"Why should I have? Your birth and position are above what we had any right to

expect, and your character as a gentleman is unimpeachable. But my child is very young."

"*Too* young—do you think—for me?" he demanded.

The position I was placed in was a terrible one. I was longing to do battle for my child's innocence; to persuade this man to whom she had promised herself that to marry her before he was fully persuaded she loved him as a woman can, and should, love her husband would be to ruin their mutual happiness for life. But my hands were tied. I feared lest in each objection I brought forward, he might detect a lingering *penchant* for himself—a jealousy of being superseded by my daughter. Could I have read his heart, I should have known I had no cause for fear—that Lord Eustace thought of me only as the coquette and trifler his last words had pronounced me to be.

"Oh, no!" I answered quickly, "a man of your age is young enough to marry the youngest woman, but May is very childish, Lord Eustace—her ideas are by no means matured—and I am afraid sometimes lest she may not perfectly know her own mind upon this subject."

"You surprise me, Mrs. Power! I have found May so much advanced for her years, at least in my estimation; I have seldom met a girl of sixteen with greater determination or more fixed opinions."

"It is her determination that alarms me, Lord Eustace. Her mind is not sufficiently advanced to direct her judgment properly, and yet her will is so strong I often fear the two will clash. She is just like poor Hugh!"

"Well, Hugh had the necessary determination to make an early choice, and as far as we can judge he would have abided by it. He possessed another gift, Mrs. Power, that

of attracting and retaining an ardent affection. I think we can hardly wish a better lot for May!"

"We cannot tell what mistakes Hugh's after life might not have proved him to have committed. He was taken away before he had had time to feel the consequences of his rashness."

"You, who have been so *very* faithful to his memory, can hardly be the one to credit him with the possession of less fidelity than your own."

I fancied there was a touch of sarcasm in this last speech of Lord Eustace, and I could only be silent under the insinuation.

"And so you really think my promised wife doesn't love me?" he recommenced with a cheerful air that belied his words, and was very inappropriate to the occasion.

"O! no, indeed! God forbid that I should! Only—only—she is very heedless, and her happiness is the first consideration in the

world to me. It is very, very hard for me to part with her!" I said brokenly, as I hid my face in my hands.

My companion was silent. He did not offer by word or act to express sympathy in my distress; and when, after a moment's pause, I ventured to look up at him, he was leaning on the mantelpiece, with rather an amused—or so I thought it—expression on his countenance.

"Lady Power warned me I might expect a little opposition on your part, and it is most natural you should feel the separation, at all events at first. But I trust that a little time and persuasion is all that will be needed to reconcile you to the idea."

"I shall be guided entirely by my daughter's feelings," I answered rather curtly, for his *nonchalant* manner was exasperating me. "If May loves you, it is all I care for."

"I am quite willing to undergo the ordeal

of May's decision," he replied in a self-satisfied tone. "I am not flattering myself too much, I hope, in imagining this to be the only objection you entertain towards me as a son-in-law!"

"There *could* be no other objection, Lord Eustace." (For worlds I would not have let him read the millionth part of the thoughts that were coursing through my mind.) "May's happiness is the one supreme object of my existence. You knew that from the first day we met. Whatever furthers it must be welcome to me—whatever retards it distasteful. I only live for my child, and the memory of my child's father!"

I had spoken with great fervour. I had thought that whether he sympathised with it or not, Lord Eustace must be a little touched by my maternal anxiety. And the light, not to say frivolous, tone in which he answered me, jarred on my overstrung feelings.

"Well, then, let me trust you will learn to regard me, at all events, as a useful co-adjutor in carrying out your wishes. I always told you in Brussels, remember, that however long it might take, I should succeed at last in conquering May's aversion to me. And I think that without vanity I may say I have succeeded. But here comes my lady to speak for herself," he said, as my girl's figure appeared upon the garden steps. "Well, my darling," he continued effusively, as he went forward to receive her; "and where have you been all this while?"

"*You* here!" cried May, whilst she submitted to rather than received the embrace which Lord Eustace bestowed upon her, and which so sealed, as it were, his ownership of my child that a shudder ran through my frame at the sight. "I thought you were coming to dinner. It's not five o'clock yet!"

"What a flattering reception," laughed her *fiancé*; "but you don't mean it, May; I am sure you don't."

"I am quite sure I do. And I suppose you waked up dear mothie into the bargain, and when she was just having a nice little nap. I shouldn't have left you, darling, if I had thought you were going to be disturbed in this way," she added, speaking to me.

"It is of no consequence, my child; Lord Eustace came in here quite accidentally, but I had already had a long sleep."

"You don't look much the better for it, mothie. What's the matter? Has that man been worrying you?" with a jerk of her head towards my companion.

"My dear! how should he?" I answered with a blush.

"Unless to hear your praises worries her, my queen," said Lord Eustace. He came behind her as he spoke, and wound his arm

about her waist, and looked down fondly on her. I have wondered since if he really felt what his eyes expressed, or whether he had any sinister motive in feigning such a mighty passion; but I thought then I had never seen him nor any man look with such pride of possession on a woman before. May repressed his ardour rather abruptly, but the sight made me feel just a little weak and faint-hearted. I pleaded fatigue, and the necessity of lying down before the dinner-bell rang, as an excuse for going to my room, and made my retreat as quickly as possible. Even when I had locked my door on all the outside world, I could hear May's light laugh through the open windows, and, creeping to observe her from behind the curtain, watched her wandering with her lover up and down the garden, picking the flowers, playing with her dog, doing anything and everything to prevent his fixing her attention, whilst his glowing,

passionate eyes followed every movement of her graceful childish form, every expression on her sunny laughing face. They made a splendid couple, as they sauntered up and down the paths together; he, with his dark, southern beauty, his fine matured figure, his glowing intellectual eyes; she, with her golden hair, her fair half-Irish, half-English face, her supple limbs and girlish, easy grace. I thought of my own blighted life, my fading youth, and disappointed hopes, and felt my beautiful child was a far more appropriate mate for him than I could ever have been. *If they only loved each other!*

That was the grave suspicion that was making me unhappy now. The rest would have seemed easy beside it. I could see that May was proud of her engagement and her lover, and that deeper feelings still were stirring in Lord Eustace's breast regarding her. Yet I could not help doubting, my anxiety considerably augmenting my fears;

if they cared for each other as Hugh and I had cared, for instance, or as Julia Bowers cared for the young clerk of whom my May had spoken so contemptuously that morning; or whether, if her girlish heart *had* gone out to her admirer, the love which he had so quickly transferred from one woman to another could be worth my innocent darling's acceptance. I lay down on my bed, and tried to rest, but these conflicting questions chased all slumber away from my eyelids. Yet there I remained until it was time to dress for dinner. I was determined, whatever it cost me afterwards, no traces of weakness should be detected in me on that first occasion of meeting my proposed son-in-law in the family circle. Not the slightest doubt was raised, during the whole of that long and terrible evening, as to the certainty of my child marrying Lord Eustace Annerley.

Far from waiting to see if I should second

"That is childish," said my mother-in-law, vigorously fanning herself to cover her annoyance; "and I am surprised to hear you raise so ridiculous an objection, Katharine. It cannot make any possible difference to you on which day the marriage is celebrated; and as it takes place from this house, it is to be surmised that it may make some difference to me. However, Frances can fix her own day, if she likes it better, though she will hardly find a more suitable one."

"Dear grandmamma, the thirtieth will do excellently well," said May; "one day is all the same to me as another."

"So I should have imagined, my love, but your mamma evidently is not of the same opinion."

"Oh, yes! she is. You don't mind, do you, dear mothie? You were only surprised because you had not heard the date before."

"I was only surprised, May—that was all!"

"And for my own part I don't care if it's the thirtieth of this month, or next month, or next year! No more does Eustace! Do you, Eustace?" turning to him with one of her bright, bright smiles.

"Excuse me; I care very much indeed. Next year would be extremely inconvenient to me," he answered with a look of admiration.

"Ah! I dare say. Because you would have changed your mind by that time. You men are always chopping and changing. I wonder now who you were swearing you cared for this time last year, eh?"

Lady Power and her daughters seemed to think this an excellent joke on the part of May, and the child joined heartily in the laugh which succeeded it. I could not laugh. I raised my eyes furtively and glanced at Lord Eustace. His were bent

upon his dessert-plate, and there was a decided access of colour to his cheek. He had not entirely forgotten, then! Some little memory of the past *had* still the power to disturb him.

I am not sure if at the moment I felt glad or sorry. I am sure that I feel very sorry now.

As soon as I had escaped from the dining-room I went to bed. There was no need to make any excuses for doing so, for Juliet considered that I had already exerted myself far too much during the day, and Lady Power was rather pleased than otherwise to get rid of my presence. She read my dislike to May's engagement and the idea of her hasty marriage, and considered doubtless that the wooing of my wild bird would go on far better behind my back than before my face. My darling wanted to sit up in the bedroom with me, but this I would not allow. If she were to be dis-

suaded from a marriage with Lord Eustace Annerley, it must be done by opening her eyes to the state of her own heart, not by forcibly detaching her from the society of her lover. And I discerned, moreover (though this suspicion again might have arisen from my jealousy at the child taking an interest in any creature but myself), that although she made that affectionate offer, she did so in filial tribute to my weakness, rather than because it would have given her the greater pleasure. So I dismissed her to the drawing-room again, only bidding her not forget to come and kiss me before she went to her own room.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE THIRTIETH OF JULY.

When my daughter had left me alone, I took myself very severely to task for the feelings I had experienced that day. I tried to believe I was before my father confessor: and laying my bosom bare of its most sacred thoughts, picked to pieces and analysed as well as I was able each motive and word and action for which I had made myself responsible. I did not come out of that close examination with flying colours. I tried to be faithful to myself, for I felt the importance of the cause I was trying, and the result was to leave my behaviour in a very pitiable and sorry light. The form in

which I catechised myself was somewhat after this searching fashion.

Question. Why do I shrink from the idea of Lord Eustace becoming my son-in-law?

Answer. I don't know.

But here my director in the shape of my conscience stepped in and said sternly,

"That is untrue. You *do* know!" and my spirit corrected itself in a hesitating voice, "*Because I love him still.*"

Q. Did he not urge you to become his wife yourself?

A. Yes.

Q. Did you not refuse him of your own free will?

A. Yes.

Q. Did you not assure him again and again that nothing would make you alter your decision?

A. Yes!

Q. Whose fault is it then that he turned his attention to your daughter?

A. Mine.

Q. Did you not consider that Lord Eustace possessed every qualification to make a good husband for yourself?

A. Yes.

Q. Have you had any reason to change your opinion?

A. No.

Q. Why, then, should he not make a good husband to May?

A. I don't know.

Q. What feeling makes you shrink from seeing his admiration of her?

A. Jealousy.

Q. For what reason did you refuse him?

A. For May's sake.

Q. For what reason cannot you accept him for May?

A. For my own.

"Your supposed maternal anxiety then," said my conscience rudely, "is composed of jealousy of your child's superior attractions,

and pique, that the man whom you deliberately rejected should find his consolation in her affection. You would wish to convince May that Lord Eustace doesn't love her, because he has ceased to care for yourself! You would grudge her entering upon a state of life which once appeared to you so desirable. You would like to persuade your heart that he is marrying your child for money—or other mercenary motives, so that you may lay the flattering unction to your soul that he has not forgotten you.

"In fine you are labouring under the possession of the lowest and most ignoble feelings, and secretly calling them by the names of the highest virtues. You offered up your love for that man as a sacrifice on the altar of your conjugal and maternal fidelity; and now that Heaven having greater faith in the sincerity of your solemn vow than it deserves, calls on you to prove the truth of your protestations by acting as a

noble Christian woman and mother should act, you shrink backwards and behave in a manner which would disgrace the weakest, most selfish, ungenerous girl in creation. I am ashamed—I blush for you!"

I was ashamed for myself. I hid my face in my hands and cried. This searching catechism had cleared the cobwebs off my brain. I saw my conduct in its true light, and felt once more that I had need of Hugh's forgiveness for my unfaithful thoughts of him.

I had deliberately and with wide-opened eyes thrust from me a certain good thing which Providence placed in my hand! What mattered it then to me *who* benefited by my loss? Or, rather, ought it not to matter very much to me, and be a cause of thankfulness that the creature I loved best on earth should become the possessor of that which should have made me so happy to retain?

Might not Lord Eustace love my May the better because he had loved me first? Might he not become all the tenderer husband and father because he had been so nearly missing the possession of what *must* eventually prove far dearer to him than I could ever have proved?

The soreness of heart remained. A sense of the unnaturalness of the situation remained (I will not write down a lie, even on so delicate a matter), but I brought all these arguments and many more to bear upon the subject, and against myself, until I thought I was persuaded that all was for the best, and knew I was determined to make the best of it all.

For, indeed, through all my folly and lack of strength, and selfish desire for my own good, my child's welfare and happiness have ever been my first thought and consideration.

My May—my lovely sunny-hearted May!

I can thank God through my tears that you never quite belonged to anybody as you belonged to me—my own *own* child!

When she came on tiptoe to my shaded bed that evening to bid me, sleeping or waking, a last good-night, I had an opportunity of putting my resolutions into force for the first time.

"I am wide awake, darling," I said, as her sweet lips touched my own. "I have been resting here and thinking."

"Thinking of pleasant things, I hope, dear mothie."

"Very pleasant, my precious child. I have been thinking of how much Lord Eustace loves you. No one can mistake the look in his eyes as they rest upon you."

"Do you think so, dear? *Really?*"

The interest in her tone was evident.

"I am sure of it, May. And if I thought you loved him as much in return, I should be quite happy."

"Then be quite happy, darling; I *do* love him, only I'm not good at showing it. He followed me just now into the hall, and kissed me, and—and—"

"And what, my child?"

"I—I—didn't mind it, really I didn't. I'm not joking, mothie."

"I hope you are not, my dear! And there is no reason you should. It would be a very sad prospect for your married life if you objected to kissing your future husband now."

"It's a great bore, marrying," said May, looking down with a sigh. "Why can't we all be happy and pleasant without it? I don't want to marry, mothie; I would much rather stay all my life with you."

"It would be impossible, my darling. I used to tell you so years ago. It is no use fretting about it."

"But I wanted to *live* with you, mothie, any way, and grandmamma says I can't."

"What business is it of hers?" I inquired quickly.

"Oh! none, of course; only, when I speak of your coming to live with Eustace and me at Castle Rivers, she always says it won't *do*, and all that sort of thing. Why shouldn't it *do*, mothie? You *will* live with me, won't you? How shall I get on without you? *How will you get on without me?*"

Her pressing questions almost choked me, but I constrained myself to answer them cheerfully.

"Why, you great baby! Do you really expect your mother to run after you all your life, picking up everything you drop, and ready to be appealed to on the smallest occasion? Husbands don't like that sort of thing, my May. They marry their wives for themselves. I shall see you very, very often, I hope, and I shall go and visit you sometimes, and stay as long as ever you will let me."

"And that will be for ever," interrupted May.

"But the plan of two families living together has often been tried, and seldom been found to succeed. Sooner or later it invariably leads to disagreeables."

"How *could* there be disagreeables between you and me, mothie?" she interrupted again.

"There will be your husband to consult, my darling, remember that!"

"Oh! I *won't* be married if it's to lead to all this bother!" cried the impetuous girl, as she jumped off the bed. "I love you *best of all the world*, mothie, and I won't be separated from you against my will—not for a single day—so there!"

Her tenderness brought the tears into my foolish eyes again. It was so delicious to hear her talk in that sweet, loving strain.

"My darling," I exclaimed, as I held

her in my arms, "say those words again—only say you love me best of all the world—and that you will always love me so, and I am content—more than content!"

"*Of course I do,*" she cried, as she warmly returned my embrace; "a thousand times more than anybody I have ever seen, or ever shall see. I would rather die in your arms, my mothie, than live in those of anybody else!"

I took her words as the expression only of her warm loving heart, and blessed her again and again for the comfort they afforded me.

Ah, my God! I little dreamed how soon they would be realised.

* * * * *

From that day I tried very hard, and I think I may say I succeeded pretty well, in treating Lord Eustace Annerley as I should have done any other gentleman who had

been approved of by the family as the suitor of my daughter. I kept a strict guard over my own thoughts, words, and actions, and each night before I went to bed, I made a self-examination of the past day, and laid a flower for each act of self-denial I could with sincerity place to my account on the shrine I had erected to my Guardian Angel. Thus I kept a calendar, as it were, of my intentions and their fulfilment, and though my shrine at times looked very bare, I suffered the humiliating sign to remain there, rather than place one blossom to my beloved one's memory that I had not earned for him through my tears.

I had every intention to be faithful to my trust. Providence, in its watchful goodness, did not design I should be too hardly tried; for Lord Eustace never reverted before me by so much as a look, to the buried past. On the contrary, he was

so completely master of himself, so quietly courteous when addressing me, so cheerful, amiable, and apparently oblivious that he had ever regarded me except as a probable mother-in-law, that it rendered my task, comparatively speaking, easy. And, added to this, he was so devoted to May, so ardent in his expressions of admiration, so lavish in his generous attentions; he seemed to grow so young and buoyant under the anticipation of his coming honours; and my child appeared so much to expand in womanliness and warmth of feeling under his courtship, that I should have been a worse woman than I am, had I not learned to rejoice with her and with him.

From that date the preparations for the wedding went on rapidly. Of course, I was consulted with regard to every detail of the trousseau, the ceremony, and the breakfast to be given on the occasion; and I

tried to take an interest in it all for my May's sake. But my heart lay above such trifles, and beat more and more rapidly as the fatal day which was doomed to separate her from me drew near. I would not—I dared not—look beyond that day.

Still my anxiety was that my artificial strength should not fail *before* it arrived.

What might happen afterwards was of little moment by comparison.

My child was naturally interested in the various articles of her trousseau. A new wardrobe is always a cause of excitement to the young, who have not been taught by experience that happiness lies beyond such abject puerilities. For a few weeks my darling was very eager and pleased with rushing about and ordering her new dresses and bonnets, which, in compliment to her own and Lord Eustace's country, were all to come from Dublin.

But as the thirtieth drew nearer, I

watched her spirits flag. She seemed to weary of the eternal discussions about colours and materials, and to become rather impatient of the demands made upon her time and her opinion.

She took to following me about the house, and leaving Lord Eustace and her grandmother and aunts for long hours together, while she sat by my chair or sofa holding my hand in hers, and kissing it silently. Once I felt that she had wetted it with her tears.

"May, my darling," I exclaimed intuitively, "our parting will not be for long. Lord Eustace has promised not to keep you abroad for more than a month—we shall soon be together again."

"I know it," she answered brokenly.

"And whatever happens, my beloved child," I went on in a strong cheerful voice (for I could be brave for her sake), "remember that nothing—not even death—can separate you and me!"

"I know it, mothie," she repeated.

"And that this little trouble—which should really be a joy rather than a trouble to us—we are wicked even to think of it as a trouble, dear May," I added wistfully.

"Very wicked, mothie!"

"That this little parting is sent us for our good—to show us how necessary we are to one another's happiness — how poorly we have thanked the Giver for His gift—how much better off we have been than others—is it not so, my sweetest?"

"Oh, mothie, mothie!" cried May in answer, as she fell upon my neck, "I wish that I were dead!"

There was nothing for me to do then but to soothe my own child with many endearments and caresses—to assure her that her low spirits were due to over-excitement and fatigue—and to bring the smiles I loved so much to see back to her

dear face as soon as possible. Yet the words she had used were branded on my heart, and not to be erased, even by her smiles.

* * * * *

The thirtieth of July dawned the very picture of a summer's day. Every arrangement that had been made to confer honour on an occasion fraught with so much interest to two important families, as my child's wedding, was carried out without jar or failure.

All seemed to go like clockwork. Not one expected guest failed us. Not a cloud obscured the face of the clear blue sky. Not an incident occurred to cast a damp on the proceedings.

The day, the company, the attendant festivities, all seemed to have been made expressly, to celebrate so auspicious an event. The Riversdale and Power families mustered in great force, and the most magnificent of costumes; the Claretowns

were present to see their godchild happily disposed of, and the rest of the magic circle was composed of satellites not unworthy to revolve in so grand an orbit.

The bride looked beautiful, so everybody declared; and everybody had a better opportunity of judging than myself, who felt my only chance of keeping up during the ceremony was not to look at her at all.

The marriage (as my own had been) was obliged to be celebrated twice, first in the Protestant and then in the Catholic Church. It was a long and trying ordeal, but my child went through it bravely, holding my hand tightly all the time. Then we returned to Gentian's Cross to breakfast, which brought palpably to my mind the breakfast that had been given there on the occasion of her christening, and at which the same long twaddling speeches were made, that caused me to feel that the only way to sit through them was to

fix my thoughts on something else, and not to listen to a word that was being said. But even that spun-out, magnificent, miserable wedding-breakfast came to an end at last, and then, for me, the most trying time of the day arrived. It had been easy to keep up before all those people, when to break down would have been to encounter sneers from my sisters-in-law, a remark from Lady Power that "*Katharine was always childish*," or petting from Juliet, which would have turned my tears into hysterics.

But when I had accompanied May to her room, and seen her arrayed in her travelling suit, and everything was finished, and there was nothing more to wait for—Then as my own child turned at the door to kiss me once more, and entreat me not to follow her downstairs for both our sakes, and I strained my eyes to look at her sweet pathetic face wet with tears, and knew,

that to see her thus, it was *for the last time* — Then—a sudden retrospective vision rushed on me; and I saw her in her helpless infancy, her chubby childhood, her budding youth, her early womanhood all at once; I saw, like a flash of lightning that reveals Heaven for a moment, only to make the surrounding landscape blacker as it disappears, what my own child had been to me from the first moment of her existence, and I could have torn her from her husband's arms as a tigress tears its cub from the hand of the slayer!

The awful tragedy in which I was taking part froze my blood. The tears that had been ready to respond to hers rolled back upon my heart. I stood before her in dumb, speechless agony. She embraced me again and again, my peerless May, crying over me as I had never seen her cry before! And I held her in my arms, with a strong nervous grasp, born of despair, and

could not even utter the words of farewell. My tongue and my senses were paralysed.

I know that she kissed me until she had been summoned more than once to go below. I know that to the last moment she tried to raise my spirits by repeated promises of a speedy return. I know that she came back several times to give me a last embrace. But that is all I know!

I stood where my own child left me in the centre of the room, motionless as if I had been turned to stone. I heard the confusion of laughter and talking in the hall below. I heard the door of the carriage, which was to convey her husband and herself to Dublin, slam. I heard the congratulations that followed them to the the carriage windows, the last words and directions exchanged in the open air.

And then I heard the carriage drive away, and the sound of its wheels grow fainter and more faint, as they rolled down the avenue and through the park gates.

Then—*I could hear them no longer!*

I put my hands to my head and staggered to a seat! I felt my eyes, they were quite dry and hard. I looked curiously at my new attire, examined the ornaments I wore, the room in which I sat, the litter which May had left behind her; and tried hard to realise that my own child was my own child no longer!

But there was one fact which I knew if I could not realise, that life, as far as this world was concerned, was over for me!

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A TIME OF WAITING.

Two days after the wedding Juliet took me back to London with her. It was the best change that could have been devised for me. Amongst her circle of acquaintance—in the midst of her merry group of young people, I had not the leisure to bemoan the loss of May that I should have had at Gentian's Cross, where every surrounding spoke to me of her. I was very unhappy, naturally, for many weeks afterwards, but gradually I began to feel hopeful again and to look forward with interest to my dear child's letters and the prospect they held out of a reunion. Lord Eustace took her first to Italy, for

which country she had always evinced a great affection, and to which she ardently desired to return. From Florence and Rome and Genoa, her letters teemed with descriptions of the churches she had visited, the art galleries and museums she had explored, the lovely country by which she was surrounded, the sketches she had made for me of landscapes and figures. But after awhile I began to think she was very reticent regarding her husband, and I told Juliet so. "You know I could hardly write when I was married," I remarked, "but had I had the opportunity for it, I believe my letters would have been composed but of one name from beginning to end."

"I have no doubt they would," replied my sister-in-law, "but you mustn't expect every bride to be such a romantic little fool as you were, Katie. These children of the nineteenth century are much cleverer and more practical than their mothers. Fancy my

Margaret refusing to marry a man with two thousand a year on the plea that she was not fitted to sustain 'Love in a cottage.'"

"She could not have loved him!" I replied.

"Of course she did not! The question is, who does love, or what the girls of the present day imagine love to be. If it comes to them accompanied by beauty, youth and money combined, so much the better, but they will make no sacrifice to obtain the two first qualifications without the latter. To hear the rising female generation discuss ways and means is sickening. I do not believe nine-tenths of our daughters have the least comprehension what the four letters that build up that little but powerful word *Love*, mean."

"If they only knew what they lose," I replied.

"My dear, the worst of it is that they are pretty sure to know it when it is too late!

I suppose there never was a period when money was held at greater value than it is now, and I suppose there never was a greater number of faithless wives than England holds at present. You have only to put the two facts together to draw the deduction our girls are reared to believe, that they cannot marry on a less income than they have been accustomed to enjoy; so the needy suitor is dismissed in favour of the man who can supply them with the dresses, horses, and jewellery that are necessary to their existence. And then when they are married, the poor suitor (who is never too poor to be a lover) reappears on the *tapis*, and the usual result follows. My dear Katie, it is the end of half the married women."

"But they *must* be found out," I said in amazement.

"Nonsense, my dear! they are very seldom found out; that is to say, the world sees it plainly enough, but the husbands

are blind, or wink at it. I suppose there can be very few men really such fools as not to see it, but they must be fools or worse. There's no alternative. I could point out a dozen married women to you at the present moment if I chose, Katie, to be ungenerous, who not only permit their *liaisons* to be patent to the world, but speak openly of them amongst their intimate women friends. Talk of Paris! Paris can never have been worse than London is at the present moment!"

"Oh! Juliet, you frighten me."

"You dear innocent Katie! Have you never heard it before? That comes of not living in town. My dear, in making a new acquaintance in this city, you have to walk as though you were treading upon eggs. Now, with regard to the women who leave their husbands for some other man, no one can defend them—no one wishes to do so, but at all events they are open in the

wrong they do society. They are the renegades from the army of respectability. They say without disguise, 'We don't care for your social laws; we don't want your acquaintanceship; *this* is the only road which will make us happy and we prefer to walk in it. Take us, or leave us, as you choose.' Such women are cut, and very justly so, by all people who desire to keep up a character for propriety, but they do their best to prevent the contamination spreading. They chalk the sign of the plague upon the lintels of their door-posts, and if you run in the way of infection it is of your own free will. But the women who excite my indignation are those who, professing to lead a life of virtuous respectability under the very eyes of their husbands, gratify their sordid desires of lust, or gain, or vanity—what purer motive can they have?—and become a mass of deceit, both at home and abroad. What right have such creatures

to receive young girls into their houses and to visit at those of honest women, to seduce perhaps their husbands, brothers, or lovers, away from their allegiance. Katie! when I see such things, I think Tennyson never wrote truer lines than these:

> 'She, like a new disease unknown to men,
> Creeps, no precaution used, among the crowd,
> Makes wicked lightning of her eyes, and saps
> The fealty of our friends.'

"Oh!" went on Juliet enthusiastically, 'if a woman loves but *one* man and sticks to him, she may be careless, unthinking, and disreputable, but whilst she is faithful she must have some good thing left in her; but for these new diseases that are turning London into a pesthouse, I should like to see them killed; I should indeed."

I had never seen my sister-in-law so indignant. Her energy quite frightened me.

"Juliet," I said in a smothered voice, "you don't think, do you, that my—my *child* could ever come to be like one of those women?"

My earnestness made her laugh.

"My dear, dear Katie, I *must* have startled you to provoke such a question. How could you imagine such a thing, even for a moment. May, to forget all the good principles in which she has been reared—to forget her husband and her duty—to break all our hearts by such a course of conduct; my dear sister, you are raving!"

"But if she were unhappy?" I urged.

"How should she be unhappy with such a brilliant career before her? I consider May to be the most fortunate girl I know. By the way, did I tell you that Mrs. Nolan's sister met the Annerleys in Florence?"

"Oh, no! How did my darling look?"

"Lovely! so Mrs. Nolan says, and very gay. I think her sister met May at some party or other. She said she wore pink, so it must have been at night."

"And Lord Eustace was with her, of course?"

"I conclude so, but they didn't mention him. I suppose he is too insignificant beside his bride. When did you hear from them last, Katie?"

"Yesterday; but May doesn't say anything about coming home, though the month is nearly out."

"You'd better take my advice, dear, and come with me and the children to Scarborough. They will not hurry back this weather, you may depend on it. And if Lord Eustace carries out his intention of standing for the county, it may be some time before he is able to give his wife such another holiday!"

"I suppose I shall have to go," I said with a sigh.

"What a complimentary sound! Yes, you silly anxious old mother, you had much better leave your children to enjoy themselves, and think a little more of your own health. You are not half recovered yet, Katie. For my own part, I am glad you have the prospect of a few weeks' peace and quiet, before you begin running about all over the house after that big, tiresome child of yours again. I know before another year is out, you will be established as chief housekeeper, lady's maid, and nurse in one, at Castle Rivers. And you are not strong enough for the situation, Katie, really you are not!"

"If you only knew the pleasure it gives me to wait on her," I answered, with a happy smile at the picture she had conjured up.

"Oh! yes; that's all very well when it entails no suffering on yourself, but just now you are much better left to my tender

mercies. And so you will go to Scarborough with us like a good girl, and I promise to release you directly that piece of immaculate perfection of yours returns to Wicklow. It is a bargain—isn't it?"

I had no alternative, and so I went with her. I knew also that it was for my good, and I tried to be grateful; I did indeed.

* * * * *

But as I had been doomed to disappointment respecting my child's return to me, on another occasion, so was I doomed now. The month at the seaside passed drearily enough, as I counted each hour to the time of my reunion with May, but the close of it found that reunion apparently no nearer than before.

My darling seemed as vexed as myself at the delay, still she was amongst new scenes and new people, and could not be expected to feel it so much as I did.

She wrote to me from Naples that she

was surprised to find her husband had made arrangements to go on to Sicily—a country he had never visited. Whilst in Sicily she fell ill. It was only a slight attack of fever, but I heard nothing of it till it was over, and I worried myself lest a worse thing might befall my treasure, and Lord Eustace not consider it worth his while to inform me.

"He ought to have telegraphed at once," I said tearfully to Juliet. "Fancy May being sick without me—"

"My dear child, it was nothing, or depend upon it the man would have written. You see what May says! She was not in bed half the time, and Lord Eustace thought it much better not to alarm you."

"But he shouldn't have thought," I replied, with a stamp of my foot. "It was his duty to tell me of it."

"Well, she's all right again now," said Juliet, consolingly. "So I wouldn't excite myself about it."

Yet the incident annoyed me more than I can express, and I detected myself looking out for the foreign post with feverish dread, lest I should hear of some fresh disaster befalling my May.

From Sicily, she informed me that Paris was to be their final destination.

"I wanted to go straight home," wrote my sweet girl complainingly. "I am so tired of sight-seeing, and I do so long to meet you again, dear mothie; but Eustace has some great friends in Paris who have persuaded him to pay them a visit. This has been an awful disappointment to me. I have not felt very strong since that attack of fever, and the travelling and dragging about does weary me so. Besides, I want to feel at home in Castle Rivers before Christmas comes, and above all things I want to see my own dear mammy again. Oh! darling, your girl is so mother-sick, I think sometimes that I shall never, never, *never* be able to part with you again."

These letters of May's made me very happy and very miserable. I, too, was disappointed and chafing at the delay in our meeting—chafing still more perhaps at the knowledge that if Lord Eustace had had any consideration for the tender attachment that existed between my child and myself, he would have yielded to her evident desire to rejoin me and brought her home before.

Three—four—five—months dragged their miserable course one after the other, and all that time May and I had nothing but the few letters that passed between us to satisfy the cravings of our natural affection. But Juliet would not let me leave her. I suffered terribly, and she knew her company was the only solace that I possessed. Various discussions had been raised as to where I should live when May returned, but I put off my decision until I knew on which of his estates Lord Eustace meant to make his usual residence. At last December broke

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upon us, and my darling sent me a joyful scrawl from Paris, to say that they were about to start for Ireland on the next day but one, and hoped to find us at Castle Rivers to receive them.

How I made Parker scramble all my things into my boxes, that I might start by the same evening mail and reach Wicklow before my treasure. How excited—how joyful—how *mad* I was at the prospect of meeting her again!

"All's well that ends well," said dear Juliet, almost as pleased as myself to witness my pleasure. "You will soon forget all about these tedious months of waiting now, Katie! And I'm so glad you are to have her all to yourself for the first few days, before mamma and the Gentian's Cross crew bear down upon you—"

"Oh! Juliet, I am so excited," I replied; "I feel as if I must die before I reach Castle Rivers."

Even as I spoke the words, a letter from my angel was put into my hand.

It contained almost the same expression I had used.

"Oh! mother darling!" she wrote amongst other things, "I am so excited at the idea of seeing you again, I feel as if I should die before I reached your arms."

But she did not—thank God!—she did not!

CHAPTER XXXIV.

CASTLE RIVERS.

On the day following the receipt of May's letter announcing their return, I found myself at Castle Rivers.

Owing to my own state of health and the short time that elapsed between my child's engagement and marriage, I had not had an opportunity before of visiting this estate, the principal one amongst her husband's property. Now that I did see it, I was astonished at its size and imposing appearance. It was a far finer place than Gentian's Cross or Derry Lodge, although, from the limited income of its owner, it was not perhaps surrounded by so many signs of luxury

the Powers were enabled to bring about them. I could not help feeling rather proud, however, to think that the fine old house before me belonged to May, and pleased myself with imagining all the improvements she would be able to effect when she came into her fortune. I found Lord Riversdale and his daughter, Lady Selina Annerley, already installed at Castle Rivers in anticipation of spending Christmas with the bride and bridegroom, as well as Lord Eustace's two brothers, who were known only by the names of Jack and Sidney. I seemed a very small and insignificant personage in my own eyes amongst such grand people, but they were all very kind to me, especially the old Earl, who appeared to be perfectly satisfied with his son's choice.

At last the long-wished-for moment arrived, and I held May in my arms again. We had received a telegram from Dublin to say they had reached there safely, and were

coming on to Wicklow by a certain train. Of course the carriage went to the station to meet them. Lady Selina inquired courteously if I would not like to occupy a seat in it, in order to welcome my daughter the sooner, but I shrunk from the idea. I was too nervous, too anxious; I could not have met her before a crowd! But I slunk away from the drawing-room about the time that I knew the carriage must return, and ensconced myself in the library which opened on the hall. There I sat in the dusk of the wintry afternoon, straining my ears to catch the first sound of wheels coming up the drive. Once or twice I was disappointed. Carts and other vehicles seemed to be coming and going, making the frosty ground ring beneath the horses' feet, just for the pleasure of tantalizing me. But at last there was no doubt of it. At last I could hear the carriage with its easy muffled sound roll smoothly over the park road and stop at the hall-door.

I heard the footmen in attendance throw open the portals, and let down the carriage steps. I heard a light step come hurriedly into the hall—I heard my darling's voice,—I could wait no longer. I rushed out of my concealment with a cry of delight and caught her in my arms. I could only feel that she was a bundle of furs and velvet, but I knew that it was *she*, and that was sufficient for the satisfaction of my yearning heart. As for May, she gave one start as I came upon her,—uttered one word, "*Mother!*" and then fell upon my neck in a burst of hysterical weeping. She cried so bitterly and her agitation was so great that I was compelled to lead her into the library I had vacated, and seat her on a chair.

"May! May! my beloved! my precious one!" I kept on repeating, as I knelt beside her. "There is nothing to cry for, dearest. Our separation is over. It is all joy and happiness in the future. You have come to

your own home, and here is your mother to welcome you! Be comforted, my May, be calm! I cannot be happy till I see you so."

We were still in this position when Lord Eustace came in, evidently looking for his wife.

"Is Lady Eustace here?" he inquired as he looked round the gloomy apartment; then, recognizing our figures by the light thrown on them from the hall, he exclaimed, "Oh! Mrs. Power! how are you? Delighted to see you again, I'm sure."

He shook hands with me hurriedly and turned to his wife.

"Frances, my father and sister are in the drawing-room waiting to see you!"

She rose at once, drying her eyes.

"Come, dear mother," she said in a subdued voice, which still betrayed she had been weeping.

I followed them in silence to the presence

of Lord Riversdale. The name by which Eustace addressed his wife had jarred, as it ever did, upon my ears. He who knew so well the history of my dealings with the Power family, why had he adopted this means of recalling them to me?

Lord Riversdale and his sons and daughter received my child with all possible cordiality, but I thought she responded rather wearily to their congratulations.

As she came into the full light my eyes sought her dear face greedily. It looked older and less bright, but perhaps that was only my foolish fancy. It was certainly very pale, but she had travelled a considerable distance that day, and must necessarily have been much fatigued. She made an early excuse for seeking her own room to prepare for dinner, and naturally I accompanied her there. But when her maid had divested her of her many wrappings and exchanged her heavy travelling costume for

a dressing-gown, I was shocked to see how thin she had become.

"My own darling!" I exclaimed in horror, "what *has* happened to make you fall away like this? Why, May, you are a perfect skeleton! You must have been more ill than you have ever let me know."

"It's nothing, dear mother?" she said soothingly. "I have never regained flesh since I had that attack of fever in Italy. They wanted me to see a doctor in Paris, but I refused. I feel quite well, and I've grown nearly an inch since we parted. I shall be ready to be shown about in a caravan soon."

"I thought you looked taller, my darling, but your loss of flesh would make you appear so. Who was it wanted you to see a doctor in Paris?"

"Oh! Madame de Brillac and her crew."

"Were they kind? Did you like them, May?"

"No!" she answered shortly.

"But you enjoyed being in Paris?"

"I liked it as well as any other place. I could never enjoy any place or anything without *you*, mothie. The world seems very big and strange and empty to me when you are not there."

"My own! And so you are glad to come back to the old country and the old mother again, my bird, eh?"

"Oh! *so* glad, *so* glad!" she answered.

She had begun to cry again, and I did not wish the maid to witness her tears.

"You are overtired, my precious child," I said; "you must go to bed early to-night, my May, and you will be yourself again by the morning!"

"I won't go to bed; I shall be all right when I have had my dinner," she replied with a spark of her old wilfulness that delighted me. "Give me that black velvet,

Jenner, it will do just as well as anything else."

I was very much excited and fluttered whilst I was dressing myself to appear at the same dinner, but I was not quite easy nevertheless.

I had plenty of opportunity during its continuance of observing my child, unseen. She certainly looked older. Her features were sharpened; there was a slight depression in either of those cheeks, erstwhile so round and blooming; and the wild unchastened mirthfulness of her eyes had been replaced by a serious look, sadder but much more beautiful. Indeed the entire change, though it woke a suspicion in my anxious heart that was very like pain, was an improvement rather than otherwise. It gave my darling's face the look it had ever wanted, something to solemnise and sanctify the earthliness of its beauty. It was the signal flag that we have accepted the common

lot; it was the sign that we have been compelled, whether with our will or against it, to call in the aid of Heaven to help us to combat against earth; it was—God help my child—the look of Pain.

As I recognised it, my own heart sank, but seemed to be bound closer to hers than it had ever been. It was a bitter truth to accept, but it added a new tie to the old one, —it made us sisters.

I could do nothing but gaze at my darling all that evening, and wonder how and why this new expression had come into her lovely face. But from the moment that I saw it, she stood in a higher light to me. She was no longer *only* a joy and delight, a pride and a blessing—she was a creature that I reverenced, a shrine at which I worshipped.

When I waked the next morning I could not at first imagine why I had such a heavy feeling at my heart. In a moment I had

remembered. It was the new expression in the face of my child. Yet she came down to breakfast clad in a pale blue cashmere robe trimmed with swansdown, and looking so exquisitely lovely and refined that, though some might have voted her delicate, few would have said she was ill.

Lord Eustace and I had been the first to meet in the breakfast-room that morning, and had some conversation respecting her.

"How is May?" I had inquired anxiously as he appeared.

"Quite well, thank you. I have not had an opportunity yet, Mrs. Power, of thanking you for taking the trouble to come here and meet us. The Castle is but a dreary place in winter."

"Oh! how can you imagine I should have been content to stay away? You kept my darling from me such an unconscionable time. But I had hoped to see her

looking stronger than she is, Lord Eustace."

"She is perfectly strong, I assure you."

"But she has grown very thin and pale!"

"She is thinner, I dare say! She is growing fast, you must remember, and the climate of Italy may have affected her a little. But she is anything but pale, usually."

"I am so glad to hear it. I was always foolishly anxious about her, as you know. She has been all I possess for so many years, now!"

"Yes, ah! exactly!" he said indifferently as he turned away. "Well, Selina," he continued, addressing his sister, who just then entered the room, "now you've come, I suppose we may begin breakfast!"

"Won't you wait for your wife, Eustace?"

"Not a bit of it. She's the most un-

punctual creature in creation. Where will you sit, Mrs. Power? What may I give you?" he went on, as he uncovered the various dishes with which the table was spread.

We had got halfway through the meal before my darling appeared. I watched her entrance keenly. She went the round of the table, shaking hands with all present, and when she came to my chair she bent over it and kissed me as warmly as if she had been a little child again. But she never even glanced at her husband. She even took the chair he pushed towards her without looking at him, though she bent her head in acknowledgment of his courtesy, as she would have done to any stranger.

I thought of the undisciplined, rapturous, hoydenish manner in which I had been used to rush into my boyish husband's arms at whatever time of the day I met him—

and sighed. But then I had been a very rude, unformed girl at the time of my marriage, and without the slightest knowledge of the usages of society. And May was nearly two years older than I had been, and had been married much longer—perhaps that caused the difference. Still I should have liked to see a look—if it had only been *one* look—of mutual love and understanding pass between them. But he continued steadily to attack boiled chicken and ham, and curry and rice, and everything else he fancied on the table; whilst she played with her knife and fork, and talked to her father-in-law, and shot sweet, bright, loving glances in my direction, that promised a world of pleasure as soon as breakfast should be concluded.

"Have you nothing to tell me about your tour, my darling?" I said some hours afterwards, when we had for the time ex-

hausted our stock of mutual congratulation and delight at being together again, and were sitting cosily beside the fire.

"Nothing but what you know, dear mothie. It was all very beautiful—Italy especially—but I don't think we saw anything new. I recognised all the old scenes you and I took such delight in last year." And my daughter sighed.

"Paris, at all events, was new to you, May?"

"Yes," she answered shortly.

"You do not seem to have enjoyed your stay in Paris, my darling!"

"Mothie dear! don't ask me. I liked the city well enough, but I hated the people. Oh! how I detested Madame de Brillac, no words can say."

"But why did you stay so long with her, then?"

"Lord Eustace wished it to be so; of course I had no alternative. You and your

paragon don't seem to hit it off so well as you used to do, mothie," she added after a pause, as she looked up searchingly into my face. The tone pained me. I had suspected all was not so happy between May and her husband, as I had hoped it would be. Now I was sure of it.

"I wish you would not mention Lord Eustace in those terms, my darling child. They do not sound becoming from his wife's lips."

She gave a slight shrug of impatience.

"How shall I call him? By what names did you designate your Hugh, mothie? I suppose all husbands are the same delightful creatures."

"I could never find a name good enough by which to call your father, my own child."

"Ah! he was a *rara avis.* And Lord Eustace is *not.* At least, in my opinion!"

"May, be careful!" I said imploringly.

"Well, mothie, what would you have? Here I am, the wife of a lord, with plenty of houses and money—and a large fortune, and a coronet in prospect—having made what grandmamma calls 'the best match of the season.' Having accomplished my duty so far in the station of life in which it has pleased God to call me, as the Protestants say, I may surely be allowed the small privilege of speaking of my husband as I like!"

"You are as flippant as ever, my child."

"Am I, mother, am I? Oh! I wish I were," she went on impetuously as she sank sobbing at my feet.

"May, May! my own darling! what is this?"

"Oh, mother! why did they ever let me marry him?" she gasped in her emotion. "Why did grandmamma go on urging me

to the step? why did my aunts say it was a wonderful stroke of good fortune—why—why—was I so blind as not to see what he was for myself, and to sound my own feelings as you begged me to do?"

She was crying as if her heart would break, and I was too horror struck to do more than support and soothe her.

"My own own child!" I cried.

I felt that I ought to stop her confession; but she was so young, and it seemed so hard she should not confide in her mother.

"I cannot love him. I *cannot* love him," she went on hysterically. "Oh! mothie, mothie! what shall I do?"

What should she do? What should *I* do?

My anguish at her question was too great for words. I was half choked with my emotion.

At last, by a violent effort I controlled myself sufficiently to reason with her. She

might have commenced her married life unhappily; she had been so much spoiled and petted at home that she might have found it difficult at first to submit to discipline and coercion; there was a great difference between her husband's age and hers, and he might have misunderstood the caprice and vagaries of such a child. But it was impossible—it must be impossible—that May's married life was not to prove a happy one.

Oh! my child! my own child! was it for *this* that I had sacrificed myself?

Such were the bitter thoughts that coursed through my mind as I fondled the dear head bent upon my knee, and kissed the golden braids that crowned it.

"May, my darling," I commenced as soon as I could command my voice, "I do not wish to check your confidence in me, but I cannot let you speak so of your husband—I was afraid—I was terribly afraid—at the time of your marriage that you did not love

him as warmly as you should have done. I tried very hard to make my meaning clear to you. I spoke openly of it to your grandmother and Lord Eustace, but no one would listen to me. Then all I could do was to hope and pray. And I have prayed, my child, through all these weary months of separation, very fervently that your happiness might be secured to you, and I cannot but believe that my prayers will be answered. Complete content is not always attained at the outset of married life, May; for most husbands and wives have much to learn concerning each other's dispositions and temperaments, before things go smoothly. But if you will be patient, my darling, and submissive, it is sure to come in time. Lord Eustace cannot fail to appreciate an attempt to do your duty. I should have thought I might say more of him than this," I added with a sigh, "I imagined he was so much in love with you!"

She had been hiding her dear face on my breast, but at these words she raised it, flushed and tear-stained, but indignant.

"*In love!*" she repeated with an emphatic scorn that was more suitable to seventy than seventeen—"in love! Yes; that is just what Lord Eustace was with me. But, mother, dear, *that* sort of love lasts just as long as it suits the lover, and no longer."

"And you can say this after six months' marriage?" I exclaimed.

"Six months! Why, he was making love to another woman before we had been married *two*."

"May, you *must* be mistaken! You have permitted jealousy to lead your better judgment astray."

"I have never been jealous of him, mother; but I *have* been jealous of my position. And I was not mistaken. Everybody knew it! Even my servants,

if you condescended to question them, would tell you it was the common talk."

I sat, listening to her revelations, dumbfoundered. Here was a phase of married life for which my experience had totally unprepared me. And to think that he—*he*—could have treated my child thus. Oh! how my blood boiled with indignation.

"You were surprised to hear I didn't care for Paris," May went on, after a pause—she had ceased crying now, though her face bore traces of her tears. "*How* could I care for it? Eustace was always away with his friends—taking Madame de Brillac to the play or opera, or dining with her in the Bois, whilst *I* was left to the company of her sisters. And then, to crown all, when I complained of his neglect of me, he had the assurance to tell me to my face that there had been some very tender relations between Madame de Brillac and himself in days gone by, and the least he

could do under the present embarrassing circumstances was to show her that he still valued her friendship."

"Lord Eustace told you this himself?" I gasped.

"Of course he did, mother; and with all the effrontery of an Irishman. That was the reason we returned home so suddenly. I believe he would have remained there till Doomsday, else. He found Madame de Brillac's *friendship* so delightful; but I insisted upon leaving the house; I said I should leave him, else. And so he consented to come back for Christmas to Castle Rivers."

"Oh, May! May! May!"

"Don't cry, dear darling! You've got me back again, you see, at last—all to yourself—and I don't know whether it is not best so, after all. I should not have cared for any man to come between you and me, mother."

"And I loved him so!" I blurted out in my distress; but, fortunately for both of us, May did not notice the warmth of the expression.

"I know you did—your paragon!—as I used to call him. You thought him perfection, didn't you, mother? Well, it can't be helped; we've both been deceived, and we must make the best of a bad job. But, if it were not for *you*," cried my child, as she fell into my arms again, "I don't know how I should bear it. But you will *never, never* leave me, mother, will you?"

"*Never! never!*" I reiterated firmly, as I clasped her to my bosom, and neither of us appeared to remember that the fulfilment of that promise must depend upon the consent of another.

CHAPTER XXXV.

"YOU WILL SEPARATE US?"

It was at this juncture Lord Eustace came in and interrupted us. He did not look pleased at witnessing our close embrace, still less at the traces of tears on his young wife's cheek.

"Are you not well?" he inquired curtly.

"Quite well, thank you," she answered, in the same tone, "and quite comfortable."

"Had you not better sit on a chair?"

"I prefer my mother's knees."

"My sister is just going out in the carriage. She expected you to drive with her."

"Blessed are they who expect nothing,

for they shall not be disappointed," said May lightly.

"Had you not better go with Lady Selina, May?" I suggested; "the fresh air will do you good this bright afternoon."

"Will you come, too, mother?"

"If you wish it, dear, and there's room in the carriage."

"There's plenty of room. Come along, then; for I shan't go without you," cried wilful May, as, without further reference to her husband, she pulled me out of the room.

Apparently there was no fear mixed with her dislike of him. The thought was a consolation to me. My child had not that extra pain added to her troubles.

But how came it that a determined man like Lord Eustace permitted a child—and his wife—to treat him so cavalierly? The only solution I could find to this question was that, notwithstanding her youth and

her position, he stood in awe of what he had (probably in a moment of irritation) put it in her power to say against him.

But, oh! how much more my poor child seemed to want my love and protection and sympathy now than she had done since her helpless infancy? My heart echoed the promise she had exacted from me, and I felt that I must never, never leave her! At least I felt so until a few days afterwards.

About that time there happened to arise a discussion at the breakfast-table relating to Lord and Lady Eustace visiting Gentian's Cross. Lady Power had written to decline coming to Castle Rivers, on account of the inclement season, and to beg that as soon as their guests had departed, she might have the pleasure of receiving them at her house instead, which under the circumstances appeared the most natural thing for her to desire and for them to do.

Lord Riversdale and his daughter had already fixed the date of their return to Dublin, and there was no obstacle therefore to the young people leaving Castle Rivers when they chose.

"And *you*, Mrs. Power?" inquired Lord Eustace of me.

I hesitated. I had fully intended to go to Gentian's Cross with them.

"Oh! mothie's coming with us. Aren't you, darling!" said May.

"I thought of it, May. I know Lady Power is always glad to see me."

"Of course she is. And what else could you do? You didn't think we were going to leave you behind, all by yourself—did you?"

"That would hardly have been polite," interposed her husband courteously but coldly, "and necessarily I never contemplated such a proceeding. But I thought

Mrs. Power might have business at her own home?"

"Have you fixed on a place of residence yet?" inquired Lord Riversdale.

Now, though I had told May, and fully believed that a double household never succeeds in the long run, I must confess that I had had a secret hankering to make the experiment with my daughter and son-in-law, which desire on my part had been fostered by what May had told me of the assurances Lord Eustace gave her before their marriage that she should never be separated from me. For this reason I had delayed to choose a place of residence. I did not expect, and did not wish to take up my abode entirely with my children, and I had dreamt of renting a small house possibly in Dublin, or London, to which I could retreat when they went visiting, or their house was full, but still I hoped to pass the majority of my time in the presence of my beloved daughter.

Now—something in Lord Eustace's tone or the confidences I had received from May, made me feel shy of communicating my half-formed plans to them.

"I have not!" I said in answer to the old earl's question. "It is a difficult matter to decide."

"What are you talking of?" cried May authoritatively. "The decision has been made ages ago. Mother's going to live with us. Eustace always said so before we were married."

"Oh! indeed," said her father-in-law and reapplied himself to his breakfast.

Lord Eustace said nothing, and I felt awkward and confused.

"That was all nonsense, darling," I said to May, lightly. "I shall have a snug little cottage to myself before long, and a room in it perhaps for Eustace and you."

"You will have no such thing," replied my child. "I'll pull it down about your ears

if you attempt anything of the sort. Now, don't be silly, mother. You know very well that I couldn't live without you, and if you go away from Castle Rivers I shall go too."

"Silly girl!" I said, laughing.

But still Lord Eustace said nothing in furtherance of his wife's wishes, but stood before the fire picking his teeth and regarding us fixedly.

"If you've done joking, Frances!" he interposed after a while, "perhaps you'll fix on what day we will go to Gentian's Cross."

"I don't care. When shall we go, mothie?"

"It is for you to decide," said her husband firmly. Still she turned to me.

"Will the twentieth suit you, darling?"

"Of course, of course," I said hurriedly in an undertone, wishing to prevent anything unpleasant. "Don't ask me, May!"

"I *shall* ask you," replied the imperious

child in a loud voice. "You're the first person to be considered. We'll go on the twentieth, Eustace, as it will suit mother," she continued.

"Perhaps it will not suit *me!*" he answered.

"Very well, then, we *won't* go. It's very easily decided. Will you ride this morning, Selina?"

"With pleasure," said Lady Selina Annerley.

"You cannot have your horses," remarked her brother with a frown.

"Why not?" inquired May.

"Because I've sent them out."

"Then, we'll have others."

"There are no others."

"Where are the brown and the bay?"

"They are not at your disposal!"

"But where are they?"

"That is my business!"

"Well, never mind! I dare say we can

do without them," replied May, as we rose from table.

But she knew, and I knew, and every one present knew, that her husband had a design to thwart her by his refusal. She did not mention the subject to me as we went upstairs together, and I respected her reticence by silence. However much I valued my dear child's confidence, and prayed it might never be withdrawn from me, I still felt that to permit her to speak her whole mind concerning Lord Eustace's conduct was neither wholesome for May nor honourable in myself. I could not refuse to listen when she came with her young heart bursting with disappointment to my arms, for that might have had a more dangerous effect than the other; but I would not encourage her to speak of the scene that had just passed. So we parted with a kiss at our respective bedroom doors that morning; I, to secure my usual quiet

hour for reading; she, as I supposed, to hold a conference with the housekeeper.

I had not been engaged upon my book for more than half an hour perhaps, when I heard the sound of horses' feet upon the gravel outside my window, and, thinking that a visitor had arrived, I rose to ascertain who it was; what was my surprise, however, to see May, dressed in a dark blue cloth habit and mounted on a tall black horse, galloping as hard as she could down the Castle drive, followed by a groom riding a small chestnut mare. I concluded she had coaxed Lord Eustace into letting her ride after all, but thought it strange she should not have looked into my door as she passed downstairs, to tell me her intention. I watched her as she passed out of sight, with proud and loving eyes. She sat her horse so well, her pliant figure swayed with each movement of the animal, and her golden braids of hair, coiled

tightly round her head, glistened as they caught the rays of the morning sun. I was still gazing at the point where she had disappeared, and thanking God for her youth and strength and beauty, when a tap sounded on my bedroom door. I gave permission to enter, and Lady Selina Annerley appeared. Her face looked unusually pale, and I could see at once that she was trembling.

"Oh! Mrs. Power," she exclaimed, "there is such a dreadful fuss going on downstairs, and I am so frightened!"

"My dear! what is the matter?"

"May!" she ejaculated.

"She has just gone out on horseback. I have been watching her ride down the drive, and wondering you were not with her!"

"But Eustace is so very angry. You heard him forbid her riding at breakfast, and she went and ordered that horse to

be saddled for herself in defiance of his orders. And it's such a dangerous horse, Mrs. Power. Eustace says no woman can ride it with safety; she'll be thrown, to a certainty, and he has discharged the groom that saddled it, and he is swearing so dreadfully about the whole business; and oh! Mrs. Power, if you could speak to him?"

"Stop!" I said feebly, "Stop!"

I had only heard that one word "*dangerous!*"

"Is the horse *really* not safe?" I asked with trembling lips, "or does your brother say so because he is angry?"

"No! really, Mrs. Power, it is an awful animal even for men to mount, and the groom says he told Lady Eustace so himself. But she was determined to ride him. She threatened the man with dismissal if he did not saddle him. And now Eustace has dismissed the poor fellow."

"Oh! never mind the man. Think of my child," I cried excitedly. "What are they doing? What have they done? Has Lord Eustace followed her?"

"No! he is in the dining-room."

"Let me go to him," I exclaimed; pushing past Lady Selina, I ran down to the apartment we had just left. I ran up to Eustace Annerley as though no coolness had ever arisen between us. I could think of nothing but what might happen to my child.

"Eustace! Eustace!" I burst forth in my agony "for God's sake tell me, is there any danger?"

He was alone, and standing quietly on the hearthrug, though the traces of anger were still visible on his flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes. He turned and regarded me steadfastly.

"Danger in what?" he demanded.

"To my darling!—with this dreadful

horse. Lady Selina says she will be thrown! You do not think it possible?"

"I do think it possible—more than possible, probable! Frances has chosen to act in direct defiance of my wishes, and the consequences must rest on her own head!"

"But surely you will follow and warn her!"

"I really don't see the use of it. In the first place I don't know which road she has taken; in the second, it is very unlikely she would listen to me if I did meet her! A wife who is openly disobedient is not likely to be secretly persuaded—"

"But she did not know; she *could* not have known," I continued in the utmost distress, "that her disobedience was attended by so much danger. Oh! Lord Eustace, she is such a child—such a wilful spoilt child! Have pity on her and on me, and take means to prevent any accident happening to her!"

"What do you wish me to do?" he said unconcernedly.

"Take another horse, and follow her!"

"The worst advice you could give. The sight of me would probably induce her to accelerate her speed and bring about the very catastrophe you dread. The animal she is riding will not bear the presence of other horses. If she meets any riders on the road, or her groom follows her too closely, I wouldn't give twopence for her chance of reaching home with all her bones unbroken. He'll bolt with her across country as sure as a bird!"

"Oh! my God! my God! what shall I do?" I screamed—"What shall I do to save her?" I believe I had some thoughts of rushing out into the open air just as I was, but Lord Eustace laid his hand upon my arm and forced me into a seat.

"It is a painful position for both of us, Mrs. Power," he said, "but the only thing

we can do is to wait patiently for the result. You must remember that Frances has brought this entirely on herself!"

"What comfort will that be to me," I cried despairingly, "if I receive her back with broken limbs—or worse! Oh! Lord Eustace! I know she has been wilful and disobedient. I can see you are neither of you so happy in your marriage as you ought to be—but if you ever cared for me—if you ever loved me even a little—" I went on hardly knowing what I said—"have pity on me now!"

"*If I ever cared for you—even a little,*" he repeated deliberately. "You *know* I cared for you—you know, too, how you requited my care!"

"Then, why cannot you make my child happy?" I sobbed. "You see what she is to me—all the world—all the world. And yet you can break her heart and mine—God knows why!"

"*God knows why!*" he again repeated. "And so should you."

"I?" I exclaimed, lifting my tearful face to his in my astonishment; "*I?*"

"Yes! *you.* You, the woman who played fast and loose with me for your own amusement! who engaged my attentions until I had every reason to believe you would requite them, and then cast me off like an old glove that fitted your purpose no longer; confessed unblushingly that you had only been trifling with my feelings, and threw me back upon myself—the world and my evil passions—for comfort and relief. You, who without cause treated me thus, should best know why your daughter's heart is in danger of being broken, for it was you—and you alone—who rendered mine callous and indifferent!"

The injustice of his taunts made me forget everything but themselves. I longed to tell him all. To entreat him, for the

sake of the bitter sacrifice I had made, to love and cherish my child. But I could not, I dared not. The time was over for such a revelation. My *friend* might have heard it. It was impossible I could tell it to *my son-in-law*.

So I sat there before him, cowering like a convicted criminal, although I knew that my conscience was free from all offence, except the crime of loving the creature God had committed to my care, too well for my own happiness.

"Don't speak of that now," I said imploringly; "it is most unbecoming our present position towards each other, and it is all past and done with."

"So you imagine—your wish perhaps being father to your thought—that is, if you ever take the trouble to bestow a thought upon me. But let me tell you, Mrs. Power, that it is *not* past and done with, and that, as far as I am concerned, it

grasped it—and so you use it! Oh! Eustace Annerley, can you be a man to plan and carry out so base and cowardly a revenge as this?"

"I believe I am. At all events, there was a time when your love might have made me so."

"You must not—you shall not—speak to me of that time now!"

"Very good! Then we will confine ourselves entirely to the present. And my present determination is that my wife and your daughter shall submit herself to the yoke she has voluntarily adopted, and that without any of the drawbacks arising from undue confidence and sympathy in her disobedience."

"You mean that you will separate us!" I exclaimed.

"If Frances will not show me at least outward respect and obedience whilst you are present—yes."

"Oh! my God!" I said below my breath.

"I am not at all sure it will not be the best thing for her," he went on with perfect self-command; "for you have spoiled her, and encouraged her wilfulness to that degree that she is becoming simply unbearable. And so long as you foster the old feeling of self-assertion by your presence, I am afraid there is very little chance of her ever changing her course of conduct. Which would be extremely unpleasant to me, and result in something more than unpleasant to herself!"

"You do not wish me to live at Castle Rivers?" I said interrogatively.

I awaited his answer as if it had been my death blow; but I felt I must know the worst at once.

"I should never be so rude, I hope, as to turn any lady out of my own house, but, if you ask my candid opinion, I say

decidedly, it would be advisable you should have your separate place of residence."

"Lord Eustace, you need say no more. It is impossible to mistake your meaning; and you knew when you expressed it that my pride would prevent my even expostulating with you on the subject."

"You save me a very unpleasant task by your ready acquiescence, Mrs. Power, and I thank you for your courtesy."

The calm gentlemanly tone was so far harder to bear at that moment than any amount of anger would have been, that it cut into my heart like a knife.

"Oh! you have your revenge, indeed!" I exclaimed brokenly, as my head sank down upon my outstretched arms.

"I hope you will not look on it entirely in that light," he went on with the same provoking calmness; "although I have had occasion to make use of the word 'revenge' in our conversation, it has an ugly sound

and is seldom mentioned in polite society. It is better to call our difference of opinion by some other name, or, better still, not to mention it at all. Nothing can be more natural than—your daughter being married—you should require a house of your own. The fact of your residing at Castle Rivers would be far more likely to excite comment."

"But you will not *quite* separate us!" I said imploringly. He had insulted me—this man—on my tenderest point. I saw him now in his true colours—as malicious, designing, and revengeful—yet I stooped to plead with him for *her* sake—the sake of my own child.

"Pray don't think so badly of me. I have no wish or intention of the kind—you will visit us, I trust, as often as may be convenient to yourself, or usual for ladies standing in the same relationship to do. But I must request — more than that, *demand*—

that during the time I have the honour to receive you under my roof, you are careful not to influence my wife to rebel against my just authority."

"I never have," I said indignantly.

"Perhaps not, in so many words, but she evidently accepts your caresses and expressions of sympathy as encouragement in her disobedience, which indeed they would appear to be to any one."

I felt I could continue the conversation no longer. I was trembling under the indignities he had offered me.

"Lord Eustace," I said rising, "I have but one request to make of you. May imagines I am going to live with her. She says it was a promise of yours before your marriage—" ("A total mistake," he said *en parenthèse*,)—"Let her imagine that it is my own wish to have a separate establishment. Let me break to her the news that it is to

be so. Do not let her imagine *her husband* turned her mother from his doors."

"You take altogether too romantic and highflown a view of the case," he replied; "but I can have no objection to your carrying out your own desire with regard to telling her the news—only—be good enough to make her thoroughly understand it will be of no use appealing to me in the matter."

I did not attempt to argue with him further. My self-pride and dignity had already been too deeply wounded by the communication.

I turned from the spot where I had been sitting, and dizzy with surprise, consternation, and grief, I staggered from the room.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

MY OWN ANGELS.

No catastrophe happened to my child that day. She came back from her perilous ride safe and well, although I heard afterwards, through Parker, that the groom in attendance had more than once been in terror for the consequences of her rashness. I was sitting in my bedroom—half-stunned with the fears I entertained for her safety and the intelligence I had received—when she returned. I ascertained that it was indeed she, and uninjured, and then I sat down quietly until she should come to me. I dared not go down to her. I was

afraid of myself, in the first instance; I was afraid of the influence my appearance might have on my son-in-law, in the second. I thought it would be wiser to let the husband and wife meet without spectators—hoping that Lord Eustace, in his desire to annoy me, might have miscalculated the amount of his affection for my darling, and that when he saw her return in safety, mercifully preserved from accident by an all-protecting Providence, his natural affection might find its vent in gratitude rather than reproaches.

But I gave him credit for more generosity than he possessed. He did not even close the dining-room doors upon their conference before his voice was to be heard raised loudly in reproach of her misdoings, and hers mingled with it in saucy recrimination. What passed between them I cannot tell; but I know I had been kept a long time in suspense before May, flushed and

excited with the interview, came in at my bedroom door.

"Oh! my darling," I exclaimed as I rushed forward to meet her, "What a terrible fright you have given me!"

"Have I, dear mothie. I'm so sorry. I didn't mean to do it. But why were you alarmed?"

"Because your husband told me the horse you rode was a very dangerous animal, and might throw you—or run away."

"What nonsense! Eustace is always croaking about something. 'The Black Prince' was a little 'gay,' I allow—but if he didn't wish me to ride him, he should have chosen one for me himself. Does he suppose I am to be ordered about like a child?"

"But, my dear, you should not have gone out riding at all. You know you did it out of perversity."

"Oh! mother darling, he has been *going on so* at me downstairs. Don't you begin to scold me too, for I can't bear it."

I heard the sound of the tears in her voice, and, looking up, saw the sweet grey-blue eyes over-brimming like wood violets wet with dew.

I could not say another word. My own heart was too deeply charged with grief and disappointment.

I drew Hugh's child closely into my embrace, and we cried upon each other's bosom.

* * * * *

But there was still the news to be broken to May that I was about to have a separate establishment from hers—and I sat about it as quickly as I might, lest Lord Eustace should forget his promise and prevent me. I had learned to distrust his every word—I broached the subject that very afternoon.

"It is on the twentieth you go to Gentian's Cross, May, is it not?" I asked quietly. We were sitting together and alone before the drawing-room fire.

"Yes, dear."

"And this is the tenth. I think I shall start somewhat before you. I have a little business to transact in Dublin."

"What business, mothie?"

'I have a fancy for finding a little cottage for myself where I can stow all my knick-knacks and rubbish, you know, and instal Parker as prime minister."

"There is plenty of room for your 'rubbish,' as you call it, here."

"I know there is, my darling, but it would not be quite the same thing. I cannot knock Lord Eustace's walls to pieces, and put up my own gimcrack contrivances and inventions. You know what a fidget I was of old, and how much I value my little collection of curiosities."

"But you will never see them in Dublin, mother."

"Oh! yes, I shall, my May. There will be many opportunities—when I am not well, you know, and require change—or you visit Dublin—or the castle is full—when I shall be glad to have a little place of my own to go to. There is a great charm in independence, you know, my child—in feeling that you have a sanctum that belongs entirely to yourself!"

"But, mother dear, if you begin by adorning and admiring your sanctum to this degree, you may end by wishing to live in it altogether."

The time had come to speak to her.

"Well, my own child," I said wistfully, "and suppose I did! I think it would be better, after all, if I had a home of my own."

"Oh! mothie, you're not in earnest," she said, with genuine alarm; "you *promised*

[illegible] would live with us. I'm sure you [illegible] never leave me again. Oh, don't go, [illegible] don't go. What shall I do if [illegible] leave me all alone?"

"My dearest, don't make my task [illegible]," I said entreatingly. "It is [illegible] darling, really it is best—that I [illegible] remain permanently at Castle [illegible]."

"[illegible] said no!" She demanded in an [illegible] I glanced up at her quickly: [illegible] were dry, but her cheeks had suddenly flamed into a bright scarlet, and her [illegible] was heaving visibly.

"[illegible] Mashaw and I have had some conversation on this subject," I said, trying to speak calmly, "and he agrees with me—[illegible] has always been *my* opinion, May—that there is more chance of happiness when [illegible] lives as was originally intended—[illegible] than own homestead, than in one [illegible]."

"*Liar! How I hate him!*" said May in a low voice of determination.

"My darling, you *mustn't* say that!" I entreated.

"I won't say it, if it hurts *you* mother,—but I mean it—*I mean it!*"

These were pleasant truths for me to hear from the lips of the child for whose earthly happiness I had so miserably catered.

* * * * *

My story is drawing so rapidly to a close that I feel with each word I write I must hurry on to the end. I can no longer dwell with pleasure on the details of my narrative. The sooner it is completed the better.

I took the little house in Dublin, and furnished it according to my fancy. I spent as much time upon its decoration as I possibly could, and when it was furnished it was as perfect as such a tiny nest could be. The walls were covered with the pictures, china,

and ornaments I had collected from the various countries I had visited, and fanciful carvings, old-fashioned furniture, well selected coins, and hothouse flowers, combined to render the little cottage quite a show-place in Dublin. Visitors came again and again to admire the style of its decoration, to wonder why it was my rooms looked so different from theirs, and to declare it was the most perfect home for a single lady that could possibly be devised.

And then, my work accomplished, I sat down in the "perfect home," with nothing to do day by day but to think of my own wants and my own desires, and feel that, with all its snugness and beauty, a howling wilderness would have suited my thoughts as well. What mattered it to me, who had no longer my child's face to look upon, that I was surrounded by smiling landscapes and painted cherubs! What music could be conveyed by the touch of instruments, or the

shrill note of birds, to the heart that was pining for the sound of *her* voice!

What taste in the dishes to which I sat down by myself! What rest on the couch I nightly pressed alone, and without even the promise of meeting my darling when the morning broke. Oh! I was utterly and entirely desolate; more desolate, I think, at that period than I have ever been since, for then all was uncertainty and suspense; now, it is over. *I know the worst that can befall me.*

I was not without offers of assistance to help me tide over the first senses of desolation in my new venture. Lady Power invited me to spend as much time as I chose at Gentian's Cross, and Juliet entreated I would take up my residence with her in town. But the former invitation was distasteful to me, and the latter would have carried me too far from May. For, from the first moment of our separation, an undefin-

able vague fear possessed me which I attributed solely to my grief at Lord Eustace's conduct, that some great evil hovered over my child. And now I know that I was wrong. That it was a great good that was drawing nearer and nearer to release my darling from the coils by which my short-sighted folly had encompassed her.

* * * * *

I took possession of my new home in February, by the end of which month Lord and Lady Eustace Annerley had returned to Castle Rivers from Gentian's Cross. I had been much at the latter place during my child's visit there, and her looks and demeanour greatly disturbed me. I have said how altered she was on her return from abroad, but from the time I parted with her in her own house she palpably declined. Everybody noticed it, and I even went the length of trampling on my aversion to speaking to Lord Eustace, and begged of him to

have medical advice on her condition. He refused, however, to see what all saw plainly; declared I had always been foolishly nervous about my daughter, and that it was the natural effect of a girl's rapid growth that gave her such a cough, and made her look thin and pale. When I continued to expostulate with him, he said if I was not satisfied, he would take his wife abroad again. He had no objection even to making his residence in Paris. It was all one to him where he lived. But his proposal silenced me. I knew it could not be "all one" to May. So I tried to content myself with pointing out the necessity for care and caution on her part, and entreating her to avoid changes of temperature and over exertion.

May laughed, and promised to do all I asked her, but where was ever the use of exhorting a girl of seventeen to look after her own health. At that age it is almost

impossible to realise we can be ill. To every entreaty I put forward, or fear I expressed, May answered, in the same light tone, "It's nothing, mother!" and I felt all I could do for my own child now was to pray and to wait.

It is marvellous to think how, when I was left alone in my solitary cottage in Dublin, to take up the burden of a new existence as I best might, the stream of life seemed to flow backward, so that my thoughts appeared, in a great measure, to lose their clinging hold upon May, and to live more in the past with Hugh. It was the first time since my young husband's death that I had lived alone (except those few days in Paris, when I had dwelt so entirely with his memory), and the soothing influence of that period seemed to be renewed with my solitary life. My heart was filled with anxiety for the happiness of my own child, but my thoughts seemed to dwell more upon

the coming bliss of Heaven and the joy and the love that awaited me there, than they had ever done before.

It was the merciful preparation for what was before me. The Divine Will loosening the bonds that held me to this earth. The gradual revelation of a light that might otherwise have had the power to blind me. Once, as I knelt in prayer, wrestling with Heaven for some token of good, a great sense came over me of the presence of my guardian angel. I seemed to feel his touch—to hear the soothing accents of his voice—I almost believed that in the twilight I could trace the shadowy outline of his immortal form.

"Hugh! my dearest love!" I exclaimed, fervently; "thank God that you, at least, are happy; that no sorrow or sickness can touch you now. Oh! I believe—bitter as it would be to part with her—that I could be happier, knowing that our child was

safe where you are, and that I was the only one left to battle with this miserable world—than I am now, fearing and dreading what each day may bring forth for our May."

And yet no angel appeared to tell me that my mother's heart had given utterance to a prophecy. At first I heard from May very often—every other day at least,—and her letters were so full of pathetic cries after our reunion that they made my heart bleed. Sometimes they worked on me so powerfully, and my sense of desolation was so keen, that I almost made up my mind to appeal to Lord Eustace in person, and to pray of him (as one sinner may pray to another), to forgive any offence I might have committed against himself in former days, and to permit me to remain, if it were only in the position of a dependant, near the person of my child.

At last, what with my own trouble, and May's despairing letters, I believe (had it gone on a little longer) I should, in some such measure, have humbled myself before that man. But it was not to be. "*Had it gone on a little longer.*" Ah! it had but such a little, little while in which to go on still.

It was now the month of April. The spring was very backward and the weather was still extremely cold and damp, and sickness of all sorts was making havoc in the land. I never wrote a letter to May without entreating her to be careful of her throat and chest, but she never mentioned her health to me in return, and I trusted, in consequence, that no change for the worse had taken place in it.

One week, just about the time I mention, I missed her accustomed letter. At first, I naturally thought that pleasure or busi-

[illegible] I should say, and [illegible]

[illegible] Lady Eleanor.

[illegible] near to [illegible] the passing [illegible] woman. But in another moment [illegible] her door.

[illegible] was standing at the foot of the [illegible] her hands—

[illegible] she's very bad." She [illegible] sight of me. I heard [illegible] I took in picture of them.

[illegible] at that moment was to [illegible] drawing-room. As I entered [illegible] my housemaid I had put the three [illegible] kneeling by something on the [illegible]. I came up to her. There—stretched [illegible] the carpet—lay my darling—Dulcess—[illegible] with the blood flowing slowly [illegible] mouth.

[illegible] no time for giving way to useless [illegible] I helped the woman to lift her [illegible] and sent at once for a doctor. By

divine feet of Him Who never fails to listen and console.

I had but crossed the threshold of my room when a knock sounded on the hall-door.

"Who can it possibly be at this time of night?" I thought to myself; and shrinking from the idea of encountering a stranger in my then state of mind, I desired my servant to say that I could see no one. Still I heard a subdued commotion taking place in my little hall, and the sound of voices mingling more in confusion than in parley.

"What can it all mean?" I thought again as I stood motionless with my bonnet in my hand.

But the next thing that happened was my maid Parker running rapidly up the stairs, and into my presence with a face white as ashes.

"Please come downstairs at once ma'am," she exclaimed without preface; "its Miss

"Where does that blood come from?"

"Her lungs! She has ruptured a vessel either from fatigue or excitement."

"Don't look at me for the reason, doctor; I can tell you nothing except that on hearing of her arrival I ran downstairs to find her in this condition. I did not expect to see her; I have no notion why she came."

"You had no reason to suspect she was on her road to you?"

"Not the slightest!"

The doctor looked very grave and uncertain what to say next.

"Of course, never having seen Lady Eustace before, it is impossible for me to determine what her previous state of health may have been. But I have no hesitation in declaring that it is very precarious at the present moment. There is no necessity for my remaining in the room with her, but I think it advisable I should not leave the house for an hour or so."

"You think she is dying? I am sure you think she is dying!"

"I will just go in again and have another look at her," he replied with professional caution as he re-entered the dining-room with me.

We found my darling lying just as we had left her, with her mournful eyes open, and roving aimlessly about the room. But as I approached the couch she recognised me.

"Mothie!" she uttered feebly.

"Come! come! we are better," said the doctor, "but I must enjoin perfect silence, if you please."

"Don't speak, my precious!" I exclaimed as I knelt down and pressed my lips to her sweet pallid face. "I am close beside you and I will not leave you for a moment, May; but be silent, my own dear, for Heaven's sake."

She did not answer, but she smiled faintly and pressed my hand.

"If you please, ma'am, Lady Eustace's things are just dripping," said my maid.

I passed my hand over her dress and underclothing, and found to my horror they were wet through and through.

"How could this have happened? She will catch her death of cold," I exclaimed in distress.

"I should advise you not to attempt to change them at present," said the doctor as he felt her pulse. "The exertion would be too much in her condition. Make Lady Eustace as comfortable as you can under the circumstances, but move her as little as possible!"

And so my dying child was propped up by pillows and covered with shawls and blankets, whilst the clock ticked out the weary minutes, and the hours of night drew near.

My dying child! I knew she was my dying child, although no one had told me so. I saw the impress of Death upon her face. And, strange to say, the thought did not startle me. I seemed to have known that it would be so all along. When her fluttering pulse had regained a little strength, the doctor left us, promising to call the last thing that night.

I had dismissed the servants and sat down to watch by my darling's side. She opened her feeble lips to speak to me.

"May! my own child, pray remember what the doctor said—that talking would be hurtful to you. I can understand if I do not know, and I will hear all you may have to say to-morrow."

"There will be no to-morrow for me," she whispered, "and I *must* speak, mothie, or my heart will burst."

I knew her words were true. I knew that to-morrow would dawn to find me desolate,

and I had not the courage to check the last words my own child would say to me.

"Nearer to me!" said May, "nearer!"

I crept as close to her pillow as I could, and bent my ear down to her cold lips.

"I know *all!*" she gasped; "he told me."

"May, I cannot believe it!"

"How I love you for it!" she continued; "how little I have appreciated the devotion of your life to me! Oh, mothie! I have been so selfish—so vain—so thoughtless."

"You have *not!*" I cried, in my despair. "Oh, my beloved child! you have been all the world to me. There will be none when you are gone."

"I am so glad I married him instead of you. I can forgive him for myself. I should have killed him if he had treated you as he has treated me."

"My darling, what has he done?"

"*He struck me, mother!*"

Oh! as she said the words, how I should have liked to have had a knife in my hand and her murderer at my feet. At that moment I was worse than himself.

"He had taken one of my letters to you, and we had had a quarrel—we have had nothing but quarrels since we married,—and he spoke of that French woman—and of *you*, my darling—and told me he had never loved me. And then I said that I would go back to my mother, who did—and he—he—struck me for it."

"The coward!" I exclaimed.

"Yes; it was cowardly, but it was kind. It gave me an excuse for leaving him—and it rained—it rained very much," she went on, in a rambling sort of way, "and I walked to the station —"

"You walked from Castle Rivers to the station, my darling? Why, it's twelve miles!"

"Yes; and then I lost my way, an
got wet—and I don't quite know how I
here, mothie; but I shall never go av
again, shall I, darling? You won't let h
come and take me away again?"

"Never! never! my beloved child,'
cried.

"Oh! you have been so good to m
said May. "I have been such a wo
and a bother to you ever since I
born—so selfish and so perverse—and
have loved me through it all for Hug
sake."

"I have loved you for your own,
treasure."

"And now it will soon be over. I f
so weak—as if I were sinking through
sofa—and I am so glad—so very glad-
go. *He* shan't take me away—shall
mothie?" with a sudden fear.

"Never! my darling," I repeat
through my tears; "but, May, I h

better send for Father Nolan. You would like to see a priest, I know."

"Yes! I had better see a priest," she said in the same mechanical way, as her head fell back upon her pillows and her eyes gazed up to Heaven.

She looked alarmingly ill. I hastened to call my servants, and send one of them for my confessor before I took up my station again by her side. But my last thought for her had come too late.

"Mother," she said with a sudden effort, "*I forgive him.* And—I—love you—more—than I—can say—"

I believed her last moment was come, and raised her dear head till it rested on my bosom. But she lifted herself by a surprising effort and sat bolt upright.

"Hugh!" she exclaimed in her natural voice, "have you come for me! Oh! how young you look. But I should have known you anywhere by the portrait. How glad

dear mother will be! She has longed for you so!"

But here the sudden strength born of the approaching change, now close at hand, died out again, and she sank back in my arms whispering faintly,

"Lord Jesu—mercy—" and closed her tender eyes.

I was gazing at them, wondering in a foolish, stricken sort of way, what I should feel to find that they had closed for ever, when they re-opened,

"*Mothie!*" she breathed below her breath, and closed them again, as the dark fatal stream re-issued from her mouth and stained the lips I pressed upon it.

For a few minutes I watched her sweet breast heave gently up and down, as her young life ebbed away. Then her eyelids fluttered—her nostrils dilated—her mouth slightly opened, and she was gone.

As Father Nolan entered the room to administer the last sacraments for the dying, I laid my own child back upon the pillows —a corpse!

* * * * *

"The first word she ever uttered," I kept on repeating to myself that night, "was *Hugh!* The last she said was *Mothie!*

"Mine and Yours, dear Husband! Yours and Mine! No one shall ever have the power again to take our own child from us."

And I think I almost felt glad, with a kind of delirious triumph, that May had made her escape from sin and sorrow—that she was beyond the reach of any man—that no mortal would have the power again to separate us.

The next morning, when my beautiful child was lying quietly upon my bed,

looking like a sculptured saint, with her white hands crossed upon her bosom, and a golden aureole about her brow, I sent word to Gentian's Cross and Castle Rivers of what had happened. But before my message could possibly have reached him, I was told that Lord Eustace was waiting to speak to me in the drawing-room.

I went to meet him, calm and composed, oh! wonderfully calm, considering *what* lay still and silent upon my bed upstairs.

"Good morning, Mrs. Power?" he commenced curtly.

"Good morning, Lord Eustace."

"Is my wife here?"

"She is!"

"When did she arrive?"

"Last night!"

"You speak very coolly on the subject, considering the disgrace it is to both of

us. Do you know of the shameful manner in which she left her home?"

"She told me!"

"And you encourage her, I suppose, in her rebellion. However, I cannot permit my family name to be disgraced in this way, and therefore I have followed Lady Eustace with the design of giving her her choice of two alternatives. She must either return with me at once to Castle Rivers or I shall repudiate her. Can I see her?"

"If you please!"

I turned as I spoke and led the way upstairs.

Lord Eustace followed me.

As I turned the key of my bedroom door I felt a spark of pity. Was this indeed a trial too great for his strength, to which I was about to subject him? But no! He had deserved all that he might feel—and

the shock might prove to be the salvation of his future.

So I went ruthlessly on—leading him straight up to the bed on which his wife was lying—like a broken snowdrop prostrate with the earth.

"DEAD!" he exclaimed, starting backwards.

I never saw a man change so marvellously. The blood seemed to retreat from every feature, and he stood holding on to the bed-post, shaking like a leaf, blown by the autumn wind.

"Yes! *dead*," I repeated, "and you killed her, Eustace Annerley!"

"No! no! As there is a God in Heaven, *no*," he said, somewhat recovering himself.

"Not by so many blows, Lord Eustace," I replied, "nor any active means, perhaps; but by deliberate thwarting of all her innocent desires, and miscomprehension of her

nature. I do not say that under any circumstances my darling would have lived, for the immediate causes of her death must have resulted from seed sown long ago, but I can say that I thank God for having removed her beyond the possibility of your cruelty and want of care. You wished to revenge yourself on me. You have amply done it. You have deprived me of what constituted my whole world. Be content with your triumph, and leave me in peace with my dead child. I ask nothing further at your hands."

"But you will believe me when I say I never thought of this, Mrs. Power?"

"You have seldom thought of anything beyond the gratification of the moment, I imagine, Lord Eustace."

"But if it is any comfort to you to know —if I could in any way console you,—" he began.

"*Comfort! Consolation!*" I said, shrinking

from him. "Do you suppose I could ever feel either in your presence? Eustace Annerley, I have but one wish connected with you now. That I may never see your face, nor hear your voice in this world again."

And I never have!

* * * * *

Now there remains very, very little to be told. I am still living, or I could not write these words. And that of which I have written happened so long ago that I can not only speak of it calmly, but think of it with more of pleasure than of pain!

For my hair is white with the snows of age, and my steps are descending slowly but surely to the grave!

And when I lie down in my bed each night, it is with a good hope that before many more are over, I may lie down in it

never to rise again, until two bright radiant angels, whom they call Hugh and May, come hand-in-hand to conduct me between them to those shores of Eternal Youth and Life and Love, where disappointment and separation are unknown.

THE END.

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